

The archival context of contemporary  
practice: how might temporal artistic  
process function as trace within the  
archive?

Hannah Elizabeth Allan

PhD

2015

The archival context of contemporary  
practice:  
how might temporal artistic process function  
as trace within the archive?

Hannah Elizabeth Allan

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements of the Manchester  
Metropolitan University for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of MIRIAD Manchester  
Metropolitan University, 2015

## **Abstract**

The thesis positions my practice led research within the context of the archive, asking if the documents and artefacts of process might remain as independent artworks in their own right. Focusing on practice as a temporal action through performance practice, research focuses on notion of the trace - those aspects of the archive which might be overlooked, or not conform to traditional notions of the document. By identifying a taxonomy of the performance archive elements such as mythology and repetition have been explored, expanding our consideration of the potential form that the archive may take.

Using the methodology of triangulation, the study combines knowledge from contemporary performance practices, the professional practice of the archivist, and theoretical debate around the archival form. In writing the thesis and parallel body of practice led research I have employed selected techniques of the archivist, whilst allowing the voice of the practitioner within the academic structure of the thesis. The study builds on existing research into the archives of performance practice, as an area of artistic activity which has reflected upon its own documentation process.

The research answers different questions from those studies which seek to archive contemporary performance in such a way to accurately represent the original, instead, it constructs an archival-artwork which exists as an independent and evolving body of practice. The research produced functions within this structure of the archive due to its fluid nature, just as the traces of a practice are uncertain and open to interpretation, so the body which houses them is one which may exist in multiple contexts.

By working with artistic process, rather than only performance events, the research and findings are applicable to a range of interdisciplinary practices, instead of those only engaged in the live action. The study offers methods for approaching the remains of these practices and considering their function in relation to the archive.

# Contents

<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Illustrations .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Practice Documentation .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1.0 The Archive: Three Perspectives .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>1.1 Archive Fever .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>1.1.1 The Place of the Archive .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>1.1.2 The Domestic Archive .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>1.1.3 In the Freud Museum .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>1.1.4 The Uncanny .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>1.1.5 Fever and Death Drive .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>1.1.6 Lost Works .....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>1.1.7 An Archive Fever? .....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>1.2 The Historian's Archive .....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>1.2.1 A History of the Archive .....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>1.2.2 The Archival Profession .....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>1.2.3 Creative Archiving .....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>1.2.4 Trace and the Archive .....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>1.3 The Artists' Perspective .....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>1.3.1 The Fragmented Signifier .....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>1.3.2 Archival Impulse .....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>1.4 Triangulating the Archive .....</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>2.0 The Performance Archive .....</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>2.1 Existing Literatures .....</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>2.1.1 Phelan and the Art Document .....</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>2.1.2 Schneider - Reframing the Performance archive .....</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>2.1.3 Taylor - Repertoire / Archive .....</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>2.2 Archive research .....</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>2.2.1 British Library, Experimental Theatre and Live Art Archive .....</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>2.2.2 Tate Archive, David Mayor Collection .....</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>2.2.3 Siobhan Davies Dance, Online Archive .....</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>2.3 Taxonomy of the Performance Archive .....</b>	<b>130</b>

2.3.1 Photography .....	131
2.3.2 Film .....	137
2.3.3 Text .....	144
2.3.4 An Alternative Taxonomy .....	150
2.3.5 Artefact .....	150
2.3.6 Myth .....	153
2.3.7 Repetition .....	157
2.3.8 Notes on the Taxonomy .....	161
2.4 <i>Binding</i> .....	162
2.5 <i>Performance Documentation</i> Exhibition .....	168
2.6 Dimanche Rouge Festival: archivist in residence .....	174
2.7 <i>A Song</i> .....	178
3.0 False Records and Uncertain Narratives .....	184
3.1 Performances That Didn't Happen .....	185
3.1.1 Hayley Newman - Invented Accounts .....	186
3.1.3 Mel Brimfield - Constructing a Performance Narrative .....	198
3.1.4 <i>WorkNotPresent</i> .....	206
3.1.5 Uncertainty and the Performance Archive .....	212
3.2 The Constructed Archives of a Life .....	213
3.2.1 Ilya Kabakov – Characters within the Archive .....	213
3.2.2 The Atlas Group – Unreliable Histories .....	217
3.2.3 <i>Untitled (texts from the archive of)</i> .....	224
3.3 Invented Histories .....	227
4.0 Text and the Archive .....	229
4.1.1 Testimony in the Archive .....	232
4.1.2 The Artist as Witness .....	235
4.1.3 <i>I Spoke</i> .....	243
4.1.4 Impossible Language .....	245
4.1.5 The Limits of Writing .....	250
4.2.1 <i>I Wrote</i> .....	253
4.2.2 <i>309 Words</i> .....	256
4.2.3 <i>Untitled (from Peer Gynt)</i> .....	258
4.3 Language beyond the Document .....	262
4.3.1 Fluxus Scores .....	263

4.3.2 Scores for a Performance .....	267
4.3.3 <i>Letters in French and English</i> (from <i>Les Craiepers</i> project).....	274
Conclusion.....	279
Bibliography .....	285

## Illustrations

Figure 1: Susan Hiller, <i>From the Freud Museum</i> (1991-6) .....	33
Figure 2: Susan Hiller, <i>After The Freud Museum</i> (1994) - detail of box Cowgirl.....	35
Figure 3: Sophie Calle, <i>Invitations</i> , 1999.....	38
Figure 4: Aby Warburg, <i>Mnemosyne Atlas, Panel 45, Superlatives of the language of gestures</i> (1927-29) .....	44
Figure 5: Aby Warburg, <i>Mnemosyne Atlas, Panel 79, The Eucharist</i> (1929) .....	45
Figure 6: Screenshot, landing page Latham archive, <a href="http://www.ligatus.org.uk/aae/">http://www.ligatus.org.uk/aae/</a> ....	64
Figure 7: Tacita Dean, <i>Disappearance at Sea</i> (1996).....	82
Figure 8: Tacita Dean, <i>Teignmouth Electron</i> (1999) .....	82
Figure 9: <i>The Individual and the Organisation: Artist Placement Group 1966-79</i> , exhibition view at Raven Row, London (2012) .....	92
Figure 10: <i>The Individual and the Organisation: Artist Placement Group 1966-79</i> , exhibition view at Raven Row, London (2012) .....	92
Figure 11: Cindy Sherman, <i>Untitled Film Still #35</i> (1979).....	102
Figure 12: Cindy Sherman, <i>Untitled Film Still #93</i> (1981).....	104
Figure 13: <i>Bird Song</i> , Production shot 19 (2004). 35mm colour negative contact sheet of images taken during rehearsals. ....	127
Figure 14: <i>Bird Song</i> , Rehearsal 1 (2004). Tammy Arjona in the performing space.....	128
Figure 15: Manuel Vason in collaboration with Aaron Williamson, <i>Exposures</i> , (2002)	136
Figure 16: Marina Abramović, <i>Art Must Be Beautiful; Artist Must Be Beautiful</i> , (1975)	139
Figure 17: Marina Abramović, <i>Art Must Be Beautiful; Artist Must Be Beautiful</i> , (1975)	139
Figure 18: Fiona Templeton, <i>You - The City</i> (1990), pp. 34 .....	149
Figure 19: Marina Abramović and Ulay, <i>The Lovers</i> (1988) .....	155
Figure 20: Marina Abramović and Ulay, <i>The Lovers</i> , (1988) .....	156
Figure 21: Siobhan Davies Dance, <i>Table of Contents</i> , ICA London (2014).....	160
Figure 22: Siobhan Davies Dance, <i>Table of Contents</i> , ICA London (2014).....	160
Figure 23: Hayley Newman, <i>Connotations</i> (1998).....	187
Figure 24: Hayley Newman, <i>Connotations</i> , 1998. ....	192
Figure 25: Chris Burden, <i>Deadman</i> , 1972.....	193
Figure 26: Mel Brimfield, <i>This is Performance Art</i> (2011), pp.16 .....	201
Figure 27: Mel Brimfield, <i>This is Performance Art</i> (2011), pp.17 .....	202
Figure 28: Ilya Kabakov, <i>10 Characters, Primakov</i> (1972-5) .....	216
Figure 29: Atlas Group, <i>Notebook 72, Missing Lebanese Wars</i> (1996-2002).....	220
Figure 30: Renée Green, <i>Partially Buried in Three Parts</i> (1996-97).....	236
Figure 31: Renée Green, <i>Partially Buried in Three Parts</i> (1996-97).....	238
Figure 32: Louise Bourgeois, <i>Insomnia Drawings, #14</i> (1994-5).....	241
Figure 33: Louise Bourgeois, <i>Insomnia Drawings, #163</i> (1994-5).....	242
Figure 34: George Brecht, <i>WaterYam</i> (1963).....	264
Figure 35: George Brecht, <i>WaterYam</i> (1963).....	264

## Practice Documentation

Document 1: <i>Binding</i> photographic documentation .....	165
Document 2: <i>Binding</i> photographic documentation .....	165
Document 3: <i>Binding</i> development as text piece .....	167
Document 4: <i>Performance Documentation</i> exhibition instant photos .....	170
Document 5: <i>Performance Documentation</i> exhibition instant photos .....	171
Document 6: <i>Performance Documentation</i> exhibition instant photos .....	172
Document 7: <i>Performance Documentation</i> exhibition instant photo and text .....	173
Document 8: Performance documentation, 35mm film. Artist - Olivia Wiederkehr, <i>Spatial Practice of Everyday Use</i> .....	176
Document 9: Performance documentation, 35mm film. Artist - Rooms, <i>Ritual #1: Counting Birds</i> .....	177
Document 10: Performance documentation, 35mm film. Artist - Francesca Fini, <i>The Playhub</i> .....	177
Document 11: <i>A Song</i> , exhibited work .....	180
Document 12: <i>A Song</i> , exhibited work .....	180
Document 13: <i>A Song</i> , exhibited work .....	181
Document 14: <i>A Song</i> , transcription of performed poem .....	183
Document 15: <i>WorkNotPresent</i> , printed flyer A5 .....	209
Document 16: <i>WorkNotPresent</i> , Twitter feed .....	210
Document 17: <i>WorkNotPresent</i> , Twitter feed .....	210
Document 18: <i>WorkNotPresent</i> , Twitter feed .....	211
Document 19: <i>From the Archive Of...</i> , detail .....	226
Document 20: <i>From the Archive Of...</i> , detail .....	227
Document 21: <i>I Wrote</i> , text produced during performance .....	255
Document 22: <i>I Wrote</i> , text produced during performance .....	256
Document 23: <i>309 Words</i> , remaining object .....	257
Document 24: <i>309 Words</i> , exhibition view .....	258
Document 25: <i>Untitled (from Peer Gynt)</i> , page 4 .....	261
Document 26: <i>Untitled (from Peer Gynt)</i> , page 5 .....	262
Document 27: <i>Scores For A Performance</i> , page 3 .....	270
Document 28: <i>Scores For A Performance</i> , page 6 .....	272
Document 29: <i>Scores For A Performance</i> , page 7 .....	273
Document 30: <i>Letters</i> , instructions sent by Armelle for using the shoes .....	275
Document 31: <i>Letters</i> , 30th January .....	277
Document 32: <i>Letters</i> , 30 Janvier .....	278



## Introduction

This study, through a process of practice led research, works to define how far and in what forms artistic process can exist within the archive, and the ways in which it might simultaneously exist as artwork. Utilising a responsive, cyclical, practice based methodology, the work increasingly focuses upon the notion of process and archives as integrated through the framework of performative practices. These immaterial works offer a challenge to what may remain within the archive, and equally question if the remains of such performance pieces might be read independently of that original gesture.

It is 20 years since Derrida delivered his *Archive Fever* lecture at the Freud Museum, and its subsequent publication. Within dialogues around this work it is frequently cited as the catalyst for a turn to the archive within the humanities. In particular, this turn to archival modes has been popularised over the past two decades within contemporary art practice. Featuring as elements in the rise of this archival referencing work includes; practice which uses the aesthetics of the archive, artists who use archival process and methods, work which intervenes in, or discusses institutional archives, practitioners creating their own (potentially fictional) archives. The varied nature of these practices has generally been referred to as 'archival' without any distinctions necessarily made between these disparate categories and methods. Within contemporary practice, much of the current research around archives has come from artists and theorists working with performance and related temporal or site specific projects. Within theoretical work Derrida's *Archive Fever* is particularly significant to many studies and practice, along with Hal Foster's essay *An Archival Impulse*. However, many of these central texts around archives and artworks have been published for over a decade or more.

There is no set consensus on what might qualify as 'archival' work; the term is applied equally to works with aesthetic elements appropriated, and those with approaches mirroring the archivist. As the trend toward this manner of work has grown, the terminology of the archive's precise nature has been often misused and adapted within

artistic situations, without an accompanying narrative to clearly delineate between these variances in practice. As a consequence, there is a lack of consistent commentary around the methodology of the artist working within this archival framework.

Parallel to this lack of questioning of the precise ways in which archival methods have become established within contemporary practice, there is a lack of discussion around the art object itself and whether it might be considered historic document, or conversely, if the archival document might be viewed as artwork. Around this issue we might also question whether the work remains as either archive or artwork, and the implications of each scenario for practice.

Within my research I have sought to examine the methods of the archivist and transposed them as an element of my own working approach as a practitioner. This research has led to identifying strategies for creating both artwork and documentation which remains as an archive of artistic process. This element of work has particularly concentrated upon temporal and performance based works, which do not usually have an enduring presence as art object within the gallery context. I have explored the ways in which this type of archival practice might create knowledge beyond the institutional settings of both the gallery and archive. The work has been observing the tension and slippage between the institutional archive, the theoretical notion of the archive explored in academia, and the archive as a process in artistic practice based research.

This work has also allowed me to create a number of studies and definitions of the archival methodology within differing contexts. I have established a working taxonomy of archival practice particularly in relation to performative work, which positions an approach to speaking about the outcomes of this practice beyond the general archival lexicon, suited to this specific method of working and its output.

Although Derrida's work has been identified as the initiating factor for much of academia's focus upon the archive, there is a tradition of the archive as subject matter, applied to a larger body of debate within the humanities. *Archive Fever* gave a focus

and name for one particular groundswell of interest and use of the archive, yet it is preceded by work throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Most notably for use in this study, the work of historian and theorist Paul Ricoeur whose key works *Time and Narrative vol.3*, and *Memory, History, Forgetting* deconstruct the form of the archive as an element of historical knowledge.

This current resurgence of interest in the archive from academics in the humanities (and psychology) was matched by the appropriation and observation of the form within artistic practice. The aesthetics of the archival had been widely used by avant-garde and other practitioners: a trend originating at the turn of the 20th Century when technologies rapidly increased the speed and number of bureaucratic government documents.

However, this uptake which coincided with the end of the 20th Century questioned the nature of the archive as a construct; rather than using the technology of a bureaucratic process to satirise it (as previous work did), this new wave saw an approach to the archive where initially artists tended to intervene within the institution to question and create a dialogue between practice - artworks - and the official archive. This was particularly evident in the work Sophie Calle and Susan Hiller created as interventions within the Freud Museum, itself challenging the institutional and patriarchal qualities of the archival site.

This study is framed by research into those artists intervening within archives or through creating their own, practitioners whose work is held within institutional archives, and my own practice led research exploring archival modes of working. Research centres around the testing of the notion and boundaries of an archive, the documents, and other component elements which it consists of. The resulting cyclical body of work explores the archival form, yet also exists as a self-reflexive record of the process of research of a three year study. Practice tends toward testing the limitations of the archival form, for example: in attempting to define the minimum possibility of what might constitute a document, understanding how a trace might exist within the archive, or to discover if

temporal practices might be recorded through embodied processes.

Work is included which tests further the limits of the archive through the inclusion of bodies of records which are complete inventions, or fictionalise elements of genuine histories. This allows for a comparison of how such forms compare to 'standard' archives or records of practice in their potential to produce and situate knowledge, or represent a potential alternative 'truth' in a demonstration of an individual interpretation of narratives.

Within my research the process by which the individual artist might record their practice is explored. This positions the act of making as a temporal, passing activity, which rather than focused upon the outcome of this labour looks to the organically evolving archive as a potential body of work. In this, I further analyse and define how this archival approach may be deliberately employed by artists in building into their practice a capacity to work within the context of the archive, marking a presence.

Research has been informed particularly by the existing and current body of work by both academics and practitioners questioning how performance is, and should be, documented. Within contemporary practice, performance studies in particular lead research and debate around the archival form and its impact on both process and work, due to the temporal nature of much of the outcomes of artist's labour. This area leads research in both practice led studies and the consideration of counter-archival and experimental forms for documents. Performance by its nature tends to depend on its legacy being carried through elements other than the 'object' outcome of other art forms. However, these material practices might also make use of the employment of archival methods particularly in terms of making visible their process.

In situating artistic practice within the archive, I also consider how this context functions as an institutional space, both in terms of the official environment of the museum, gallery and Derrida's *domicile* origins of the form, and in comparison the individual artist's informal holdings. The research process moves from the institutional and

established interpretations of the archives, to experimental artist led forms. The studio environment acts as an alternative location for the form, as does the shift toward digital forms, again represented by both the institutional organisation's website and countered through emergent forms of archive access alongside blogging and social media forms as a platforms accessible to individual practitioners.

The increase in the archival 'turn' in practice over the past two decades has led to a number of subcategories and appropriation of both the aesthetics and term 'archival' by artists and curators. This study is focused particularly on works which reflect on the form and context of the archive, with artists who make conscious moves to work with or against the institutional conventions of the archive. Both my own practice led research, and the analysis of work by other artists either apply archival methods in their making, or use the archive as subject matter. However, all are connected in their focus upon how the archive functions within the context of artistic practice and contemporary art dialogues, addressing these issues specifically.

The focus of my research into other artists seeks to analyse work which specifically questions the role of the archive in contemporary artistic practice, and the implications of varied approaches to the form. Works have been selected which explore how process itself might be represented, or explore the effectiveness of the archival structure in its ability to document or otherwise mark the passed moment of action. These practices vary in medium and style, yet all are concerned with this past gesture, narrative, performance, and the ways in which it may be contained (or excluded) from the archive.

With the 'turn' toward the archival identified by Foster, there is within contemporary art practices a large body of works referencing the archive and its aesthetics. This study avoids those approaches which tend toward the nostalgic values of the form, or the adoption of its surface aesthetics alone. This nostalgic approach differs in that the aesthetics of the archive are appropriated to create meaning, as marker of age, rather than to be interrogated as potential content. Linked to this, the study does not deal with

the vast area of memory studies and its associated politics, methods and art practices. Although elements of this discipline do overlap (thinking about the nature of the witness through the work of Giorgio Agamben in *Remnants of Auschwitz* as the main example), it is an independent subject from the archive, and this separation should be stressed. The archive is concerned with the physical manifestation of history through documents, and in this study counter-archival forms which are less fixed. However, memory studies are focused upon the individual's recollection and the cultural inherited memory not the archival forms themselves.

The archival professional guidelines and history has been a central element of my initial research process and the consequential adaptation of these methods in my practice. However, these are techniques already well documented elsewhere, and rather than repeating them within the text of this thesis at length instead they are made evident through the practice and form of the document itself. Instead, discussion of the archival profession is focused upon those experimenting with the form and proposing methods and ways of viewing the archive which correspond with artistic practices in particular.

The thesis details research carried out within the Tate archive (specifically focused on the David Mayor Fluxus collection), and the Experimental Performance and Live Art archive at the British Library. Both of these deal specifically in the documentation of performance works, as examples of how the art remains through archival elements as opposed to the art object itself. Work carried out at these two institutional bodies central in establishing a review of the field of the performance archive. The online archives of John Latham and Siobhan Davies Dance are also discussed in detail as examples of smaller institutions who have created experimental archives in the digital realm. Both demonstrate the approaches of smaller institutions, and in so doing represent a more experimental attitude to their structure and presentation. Each uses technology to create connections between holdings and a unique narrative and pathway through the documents for each viewer.

The selected archives spanned from the large and institutionally held, to the art

organisation of Siobhan Davies and the John Latham archive within its academic framework. However, by their nature, even those archives held by the Tate and British Library were smaller sections of the larger whole (for example the David Mayor collection is just one of many personal archives held by Tate). This focus upon the smaller, fractional elements reflects the scale of my own research as a practitioner creating an archive of work, and the approach of the unofficial, individual making a place within and through that structure. All of the institutional archives were catalogued and authorised to some extent, contrasted with my own archive and the work of other artists which generally remains outside of that framework.

The project has been guided by a series of aims which evolved over the initial stages of study and research. These shaped the following research in providing a focus for the interrogation of documents, and creation of work.

- To investigate how far artworks and evidence might be considered as archives, and conversely, how far the archival elements of artists' archives might be considered artworks.
- To observe whether artistic practice might be situated within the archival site, and test how an artistic practice might be represented within an archival structure
- To define the variations in how artists might interact with and produce work within the archive

In working toward these aims I have built on the hypothesis that an artistic practice (namely, my own) might situate itself within an archival context and thereby merge the methodology of artist and archivist. One key approach of the study is the application of this archival methodology to both my own practice, and in exploring the work of other artists and writers. This involves examining the work on performative remains and archives from the perspective of archivist as well as theorist and artist: engaging in the practicalities of the remains and how they function within that archival space. The work

of Ricoeur in particular has allowed me to bridge these disciplines, in his theoretical work which provides a taxonomy of historical sources he describes the notion of the trace, but alongside it also a description of the archive itself as a physical and functioning body, rather than only theoretical construct.

The overall methodological approach is built with an acknowledgement of the subjective nature of a study carried out by a practitioner/researcher and the personal response to the practice as part of the method employed. The experimental model matches this practice led approach to the study, with hermeneutic methods as an extension of existing interpretive studio based processes. The reflective nature of the enquiry results in an ongoing dialogue between the researcher and materials, in this case the growing archival body of remains. This reflective and immersive mode of study results in an emergent methodology which responded to the ongoing research process and results.

Applying archival methodologies to my own practice, is reflected in the collection of a number of traces and versions of each 'work'. Carrying out this research necessitates the generation of an archive reflecting my own process and practice carrying out the study. There is no pre-determined 'final' piece which remains in the archive – just as there would not in any other – rather a collection of what has remained. The role of documentation within the thesis is considered as a selection from this wider archival body: representing fragments of a whole, much in the manner of exhibitions of archival materials. The images stand for elements of this archive, rather than functioning as independent, individual works. Practice is represented through planning diagrams, research notes, photographs of works in development and performances, objects resulting from or involved in the process, performative and reflective writing at various stages in the making process. This work is collected and ordered as an archive, boxed and ordered in line with professional archival practices. An accompanying catalogue tracks the objects contained within, and the three years of work which make up this body.

This form of the work as physical archive operates in parallel to the thesis (whilst



included as documentation within it) and undergoing a number of evolutions as a physical collection of research this body of practice leads the research process, functioning as a cyclical and self-reflexive body of work. The archive of practice exists in a form allowing for experimentation in its exhibition and situation –installed as an exhibited body of work it acts as a key accompaniment to the reading of the research.

Practice based methods have led the process of research within the project – most obviously in the making of artworks, but also in reflective writing and connecting the theoretical framework with tacit choices that are worked through by this process. The practice based writing is used as a method of reflection from the perspective of the artist, but also as one encountering the remains of that practice. The voice of this practice provides an alternative, yet symbiotic, connection to the theoretical discussion of literatures and the work of other artists. This model of research has allowed for a synthesis between the practice led research and the academic discussion, whilst maintaining the nature of my own process as a shifting and elusive manner of working.

This voice has allowed the tacit and instinctive choices made through practice to become evident within an academic context. Initially conceived as a journal or archive in its own right - a series of traces and statements made in the moment of dialogue with the subject and materials – the writing was originally a blog to record my work for personal reference. However, this writing instead became a central element of how practice exists and is framed within the thesis. It allows for the practice to exist as a passed moment (the writing is from the voice of that moment of creation or witnessing and practitioner), and understood as an archival element and as such part of a wider whole.

Research has been carried out by the application and testing of theoretical models of the archive through practice. In adopting the methods of the archivist whilst researching as an artist the work tests the integration of these two approaches. Yet, other smaller projects within the whole question more specific theories and approaches. This fragmented approach allows for the focus of chapters to shift between the subject

matter of performance, reality and language - whilst also itself mirroring the structure of the archive with documents groups into fonds, levels, and series. Subsequent reflections on work made in the emergent space of the studio, alongside reflective writing, allows for connections between texts to be made with my own practice. These artefacts of making (the fleeting traces of action research, tacit choices, and instinctual work) are then further interrogated, and repurposed, in making later practice led outputs and the discussion of these early stages of research within the thesis. Through this approach the works themselves evolved further meanings and shifted in context in order to test the model of the archive with its constituent fluid elements. Selected theoretical models, such as Ricoeur's construct of the trace, are tested through this research. The ideas are applied to my practice (the archival remains), working through and questioning them in a process which culminates in the reflective writing. Following this the cycle returns to the theoretical text, now shifted and repurposed within my own model of the archive.

In making the work the media are selected on the basis of which is the most appropriate at each stage of enquiry. However, the practice is focused upon those forms which are 'archival' in building a body of traces from the performative live works which have passed. Shifting across disciplines is an integral element of my practice and important to the study in terms of allowing for the practice to be situated in the liminal, between spaces, of the inquiry. It has also allowed for a testing of the taxonomic structure of the archive, both in terms of my practice as an individual and in applying this knowledge to that of others. Between performance, literature or archive – works are fluid and can exist in different states depending upon the context and method of dissemination. A key objective in the making of work is in creating pieces which exist as traces and can be subsumed within the final archival structure of the study and method of presentation through the thesis and other outputs. Conversely, pieces of my own performance, live or durational works face the problem of documentation and inclusion within the archive. Creating the works and reflecting upon them as the artist/researcher is an integral element of the process, however the works are intended to also be tested and disseminated in public spaces (be they galleries, or alternative archival/digital spaces) in

order to assess how far an archive can be tested, interpreted, and interrupted.

The critical sources belong to a number of disciplines – philosophy, literature, archival practice, and artistic epistemologies are all represented. Gray and Malins refer to this method of enquiry as triangulation: the consideration of multiple viewpoints in exploring the subject, allowing for a collective interdisciplinary response.<sup>1</sup> In employing this method I am placing my study within the liminal space between artistic, theoretical and archival paradigms.

The research project is subdivided into chapters and parts, individual bodies of work within the whole which approach distinct elements of the archive, and are represented as such within the thesis. These bodies of work question specific aspects of the archive as concept: a cross sectional view of the subject, as outlined within the objectives. Inevitably these strands will refer to each other and to varying extents intertwine (equally the artwork's archiving and reinterpretation will bridge these categories). In this approach of distinct, yet interconnected projects I have reflected the model of the archive's ordering, and the constituent elements that make up the whole. The research is divided into series and fonds, in the same manner as an archival catalogue, applying the methodology of the archivist in ordering the collected documents and remains. Navigating the work in this way the work is ordered in such a way as to create juxtapositions between the practice and theoretical research. Using an archival structure has allowed for an exploration of how selected artefacts of practice are displayed together, creating new connections and narratives.

The thesis has been structured in order to reflect the form of the archive and as a representation of the research process with a symbiotic relationship between theoretical discussion of the archival form and my own practice. In demonstrating these aspects the thesis is approached as an archival body itself (that of my own research process) with the work structured by theme and 'catalogued' through a system of ordering the

---

<sup>1</sup> Carole Gray and Malins, Julia, *Vizualizing Research: A Guide to the Research Process in Art and Design* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004), 137.

content according to type and subject. Within this framework the content is divided across four central elements of enquiry: the archive as construct, the performance archive, reality, and language, making up the four central chapters.

The first chapter of the work most explicitly uses the approach of triangulation in its form; divided into three parts it analyses the archive from the theoretical stance, that of the archivist, and finally, that of the artist. Each connects with the other, forming a framework within which the ensuing body of work is situated. *Archive Fever* acts as a key text for the theoretical debate around the form, as a text which has sparked a renewed interest in the form, and also acts as a complex and controversial tool for thinking through the archive. This Derridean reading is contrasted with the Freud Museum (where the lecture was originally situated) as both a physical location representing a modern *arkheion*, and providing a space where artists have intervened within that archive. The second part (1.2) deals with the archive on a more physical and practical level investigating how it is used and viewed by the historians and archivists who encounter it on a daily basis. In studying the form itself, and how the archive came to be formed through archival science and the profession I go on to apply this knowledge to my own practice. This section of the chapter also introduces work by Ricoeur on the trace and notion of intratemporality. The trace, as an element of the archive, and specific type of non-conscious documentation has provided a crucial model for thinking about how performance might be archived, and how those remains may become independent works. Finally, in looking to the archive in artistic practice (1.3), I considered the ways in which it has been historically adopted by the avant-garde practitioners in a response to the highly bureaucratised context they operated within, going on to consider its modern resurgence through the frame of Hal Foster's article *An Archival Impulse*. Contemporary writers and artists have worked beyond the draw of nostalgia, and are now using the archival form as a model for experimentation and research, as demonstrated in the analysis of Neal White (as an artist working with the use of land and its interpretation in non-standard archival locations).

The second chapter focuses particularly on the performance archive, as an element

which does not remain in the same way that other practice might, yet is nonetheless represented by traces and other forms of documentation. Again, this is divided into sections, with four key parts; the performance archive explored through literature (2.1) and my own research using existing archives (2.2), an emergent taxonomy of its elements (2.3), and documentation of my own practice led research (2.4 – 2.7). The first section opens with a reconsideration of Peggy Phelan's work, which is often read as a criticism of archives, I instead position it as asking us to consider their potential beyond the live. Following on from this there features a discussion around the work of Rebecca Schneider again, considering the potential of the archival form where performance, and re-performance may act as documentation. Moving to Diana Taylor's positioning of the alternative form of the repertoire acting as a counter to the written and object based archive, instead focusing on embodied forms of knowledge and remembrance. I go on to discuss research carried out with three different performance archives, as case studies: the British Library archive of Experimental Theatre and Live Art, the Tate held David Mayor archive of British Fluxus practice (predominantly 1970s), and the online archive of the Siobhan Davies Dance company. These are contrasted with the research into performance theory literatures, through which I establish a working taxonomy for the performance archive. This includes the physical, expected elements, but also includes remains more like the 'inscriptions' of Derrida, considering re-performance and mythology as ways for performance to remain. This is followed by a body of my own practice, moving from early experiments with performance and recording (*Binding*), to collaboration with other artists and curators (Dimanche Rouge, East Street Arts), and finally, a multi layered project which is expressed through performance and multiple traces, yet has no fixed definitive form (*A Song*).

Examining the archive of performative practices in further detail, the third chapter looks to those artists who use archives to both mislead and play with the form, questioning if it is really necessary for the events to have taken place in order to be considered for valid inclusion within the archive. This interrogation is initially placed within the context of performance practice (3.1), exploring the work of Hayley Newman and Mel Brimfield as artists who construct false realities through the documents and archives they produce,

challenging in different ways (one subtly within the gallery context, the other in a camp and eccentric manner, reflecting research into much earlier theatrical archives), how performance is represented through its documents, and just how close to the reality of experience it is. This is reflected in my own practice where in *WorkNotPresent* a 'live' online archive was created and distributed via Twitter, of a piece which – arguably – never took place. Moving beyond performance practices, the chapter (3.2) goes on to discuss the work of Ilya Kabakov and Walid Raad (the Atlas Group) in this context of truth and fiction in the archive. Both artists were creating work in significant socio-historic contexts (Soviet Russia and the Lebanese Civil Wars), so their work creating faked records of experience, have further reaching consequences for the archive and its adoption as art form. This doubling, and redoubling of layers of truth, fiction and experience is reflected in a body of practice led research around automatic writing which tests how far this reality can be conveyed through reinterpretation and in the viewing of work within an exhibition and archival context.

The final chapter explores how the performative gesture is represented by both written and spoken language within the archive. Through the work of Agamben on the nature of witness and testimony, I explore how the artist might occupy this stance within the archive (4.1). The first-person narrative works of Renée Green and Louise Bourgeois are applied to this model, where the artist, by attempting to mark space within the archive through remains, is placing themselves as witness. In this part of the thesis I also test Agamben's model through two works of my own, *I Spoke*, and, *I Wrote* (4.2). These works use the performative gesture and its recording to attempt to mark the smallest possible register within the archive – through the acts of speech and writing alone. Language goes on to be considered as potential intratemporal object within the archive. Through working with Fluxus archives (4.3), I found that the performance scores which remain in archives, and as works of art, document performances that have passed, never happened, and are yet to happen – all in the same manner. This simple form, very often just a few lines of the briefest instructions represents a place where the intratemporality of traces can become evident, and the expected temporality of the archive and its contents is challenged. In response to this research I have worked on a

number of performance scores, including the publication featured here, the result of a month long residency exploring the form (*Scores for a Performance*). The later work (*Letters*) took the earlier research around false records and witnessing, using the form of the letter here, yet influenced by the score, to create a series of texts describing to another the series of actions that did/did not happen.

Through each chapter the archive and its relationship to practice is analysed and tested from a different perspective. As the thesis and the physical archive of my own work evolved, the study grew to focus particularly on the absent gesture of the practitioner; the trace of a process evident through the remains left by the individual artist. As the theoretical discussion of the archive frames the opening of the thesis, the practice led research exists as a body of traces, elements of which introduced later in the thesis, yet also operate independently as a larger body of parallel work. This thesis positions the documentation of the practice led enquiry, alongside the voice of the practitioner as witness to the experience, the academic study of the archival form and the work of practitioners within that context.

The relationship between my own archival body of practice led research and the theoretical work of the thesis exemplify many of the elements of the enquiry itself. The interplay between these aspects of the work offers insights into the role of practice in the archive: how each might be represented and supported by the other, into the reading of that work within the archive, and the potential representation of that knowledge in an academic context.

## Notes for readers

The thesis is written in an archival format, using a system of levels, series and fonds to mark collections of work and related subject matter.

Digital readers may use hyperlinks within the text to access further documentation online, for readers in print these are included as footnote web addresses.

The most part of the thesis is written as shown,

*the reflective and theoretical voice referred to is marked in this style.*



## 1.0 The Archive: Three Perspectives

In laying the foundations for my study, this chapter explores the notion of the archive through three differing perspectives: the academic, the historian-archivist and the artist. In doing so I will provide a review of the literature and theories relating to the archive.

The theoretical, academic archive is explored through *Archive Fever* by Derrida. This text, although controversial to some in its arguments, raises a number of topics central to my own study, such as the archive's link to site, and its connection to the Freudian death drive, whilst also providing the point of origin for the upsurge of interest in the archive (according to most commentators), since the text's publication. Within this section the link from Derrida's text to the Freudian notion of the uncanny allows for further exploration of the connection to place and specifically the crossover between home and institution. These three perspectives have been placed at the beginning of the thesis as positions between which my study is framed. These three contrasting models for the archive provide a context for the study, and demonstrate the potential of what an archive in relation to artistic practice might be, and the manner in which it might function. Points of dislocation and tensions exist between these stances, yet they provide a comprehensive survey of the archival form.

This chapter demonstrates some of the difficulty in providing a definitive description of the archive. In each of the three parts, this is made evident as the understanding of the form shifts to suit each situation: as theoretical structure which challenges the domestic with its patriarchal function, a strictly ordered and regulated collection of documents, and finally, as a space and method to situate artistic practice.

Part Two describes how archives are viewed by both historians (as the source for knowledge) and archivists (as the keepers of these collected materials). This allows for an understanding of how archives are seen to narrate history through the documents and objects they contain. The notion of the trace is central here, as described by Paul Ricoeur in his taxonomic account of historic sources. The contents of the archive are

here, now, in the present, yet they point to an unknowable past. The archive is also critically shaped and conceptualised by the professional practice of archivists. Moving on to contemporary work in this area, a discussion of new methodologies is included. These challenge established ways of preserving and interacting with the content: what is termed 'creative archiving'.

Finally, the chapter looks to the archive as explored by artists. Specifically, this section seeks to understand the significance of the archive in current practice, and why the 'archival trend' (as Hal Foster describes it) might have occurred, if indeed, it is ratified as a new movement in contemporary practice rather than an enduring concern. The section goes on to outline how artists might approach an archive of their own practice through the experience of Barbara Steveni recognising, selecting and eventually selling to Tate the Artists' Placement Group archive.

## **1.1 Archive Fever**

The starting point for this study of archival literature is Derrida's *Archive Fever*. It is both ubiquitous,<sup>2</sup> controversial, and abstract.<sup>3</sup> Beyond the realm of academia it has also been reflected on by archivists, and has become a point of reference for artists. Much like the archive (which Derrida does not readily attempt to define) the text shifts, representing different things to different readers. My own reflections within this chapter are focused on how Derrida describes the archive as particularly situated within the domestic space of the patriarchal and the implications of (female) artists intervening within that space. Here, the site of the archive is represented by the Freud's London home, with the divide between public and private transgressed as a quality of the Derridean archive.

---

<sup>2</sup> Few papers, articles or panels take place within the field of contemporary art focused on the archive without a reference to Derrida's text. Key phrases are often repeated as epigraphs across large numbers of both journal articles and researcher's theses.

<sup>3</sup> The text has particularly challenged the view of professional archivist's work as a technical and practical process as it had been previously framed within the profession and particularly its training programmes.

Derrida's method of (re)positioning the archive is from the very outset loaded with the weight of history, with multiple potential identities grafted onto - and represented - by the form. The archive of Derrida (the one spoken of as here, situated in the Freud's house, and documented via the printed version *Archive Fever*) is a pliable notion which might include the structure of the building, the sense of the uncanny, and the memory of skin.<sup>4</sup> The text established a contentious argument that still fuels much debate across artistic, academic and archival fields.

The loose application of terms by Derrida in reference to the archive, memory, public and private space, make the text a complex - and at times contradictory - work, where the accuracy and precision of the archivist's practice is frequently exchanged for Post-structuralist lateral jumps across epistemologies. For these reasons, application of the text as method through which to investigate archives or practice must be approached with a degree of caution.

### 1.1.1 The Place of the Archive

Many discussions of *Archive Fever* begin with Derrida's starting point (although he claims it is not one): an excavation of the word archive. This etymological enquiry locates the origins of the term as centred *around* place. Here, Derrida connects with Foucault's interpretation of the archive - it is within language itself, never neutral, that words are "so many objects formed and deposited by history."<sup>5</sup> In this approach the word 'archive' is rent, and is to be understood as in dialogue with itself, "a series of cleavages will incessantly divide every atom of our lexicon."<sup>6</sup> The archive of Derrida redoubles and is haunted by its own memory. We have the *arkhe* of the "originary, the first... in short to the commencement", and an earlier understanding of *arkhe* as "the

---

<sup>4</sup> Here, it is worth returning to the issue of ubiquity around the text and noting that it is only certain key passages which are widely cited and repeated. Other large sections of Derrida's work have been in the main overlooked, for example the discussion of how the skin might act as a site of memory, particularly framed through a cultural memory and inheritance.

<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Routledge, 2005), 331.

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 1.

commencement."<sup>7</sup> Carolyn Steedman describes this approach of Derrida as functioning by "inflating a concept so that it joins up with its supposed opposite, thereby demonstrating that - there is no opposition at all."<sup>8</sup> This assessment of the technique, and the necessary shifts in logic and the mirroring/doubling quality continues as a theme throughout the work.

As the most frequently cited element of the text begins to unfold, it connects the archive to the Greek *arkheion*, "initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded."<sup>9</sup> Along with the earlier translations of *arkhe*, this original of the archive is irrevocably tied to place as a constant. The *arkhe* as both command and originary requires - and is defined by - the identification of a physical site from which the command is given, or from which a first can emerge. Yet, Derrida states that obscured by layers of meaning, this doubled understanding both takes shelter from and forgets itself. The *arkheion* as a specific archival 'place' is brought to the fore in Derrida's discussion. The place of commandment and commencement, where law is represented, is a place of power. Again, there is a doubling between the site of the archive being at once a private family home, and the official, legal, nature of its contents.

### 1.1.2 The Domestic Archive

"Even in their guardianship or their hermeneutic tradition, the archives could do neither without substrate nor without residence."<sup>10</sup>

The blurring of these boundaries between the public and the private situation of the archive allows for "domiciliation [to] become at once visible and invisible."<sup>11</sup> The

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester : Manchester University Press, 2001), 6.

<sup>9</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 2.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 3.

example given to demonstrate this process is the Freud House (now the Freud Museum), where an original version of the text was situated as a conference paper, and this textual representation is located in the opening section of the book. This aside that situates the work, given through parentheses, illuminates the fluid nature of the thesis though it is pinned to a specific example. "The passage from one institution to another"<sup>12</sup> is evident in the at once present and hidden domestic functions of the Freud's home. These competing elements shelter within the archive, occupying a liminal space between/as both of these interpretations.

However, to Steedman, Derrida's connection to the Freud house is a questionable one. She identifies the link as being between the psychoanalytic practice and its search to identify and "recover moments of inception, beginnings and origins which – in a deluded way we think might be some kind of truth" and Derrida's then overlaying of this with his notion of archive fever, that "the desire for the archive is presented as part of the desire to find, or locate, or possess that moment of origin, as the beginning of things."<sup>13</sup> This reading does not completely dismiss or discredit, but rather, through this connection implies that the grounding of the study is less than stable, reliant as it is upon a psychoanalytical approach to the archive.

Derrida recognises the power structures of archives as pairing the ability to name, classify, and order, with the "power of *consignation*"<sup>14</sup> (a dual action in the sense of both situating materials and "*gathering together signs*").<sup>15</sup> Again, these definitions of the archive's qualities require a specific space to function within, yet the intersecting and cleft meanings defy attempts at a straightforward classification. The previously identified domicile of the archon has been transformed through the presence of the archive, no longer a private domestic space, yet neither fully bureaucratic. The once domestic setting and the patriarchal authority of its overseer are paired as central tensions

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Steedman, *Dust*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

between which the archive resides. The notion of a liminal space applies to these earliest examples and also the setting of the Freud house, connecting the two eras via the innate potential of the archive as cleft and temporal.

Derrida quite deliberately locates his discussion of the archive within a liminal, contested space; "having become a museum, Freud's house takes in all these powers of economy",<sup>16</sup> including all the seemingly contradictory qualities of the public/private space. So, the theme of leaving a mark - equated with the notion of actively 'archiving' - is situated within the Freud's domestic museum.

Within the text Derrida loosely interchanges the terms museum and archive in a manner which might cause concern for those working within fixed definitions of either. Equally, the notion of 'archiving' becomes synonymous with the act of marking. It is here that the fluid terminology, and the problems it might cause the reader, are most evident. The definition of a museum and archive, although connected, are quite distinct to those engaged in either profession or their surrounding dialogues

The marking of a sign, be it writing, or on the body, is externalised and in doing so becomes material for the archive. Yet Derrida further activates this process, so Freud producing work via publishing books becomes Freud deliberately engaged in "archivization".<sup>17</sup> This is a notion that might trouble archivists - they would usually describe the documents they preserve as not produced specifically *for* the archive but remaining as the trace of some other action. This adoption of archive as a verb has arisen from the theoretical interpretations of the form as opposed to professional archival guidelines and descriptions. Derrida's model also holds wider implications, that to write is itself an act of archiving and as such potentially broadens the field to an unwieldy state. Again, Steedman points to just how far this interpretation of the archive has deviated from her own (historian's) experience of the archival, and how the text switches between vastly differing examples of form:

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 9.

“Many kinds of repository were strapped together here, in the portmanteau term ‘the archive’, as Derrida considered their limits and limitations, their denials and secrets.”<sup>18</sup>

The Freud house (in its present state) is identified by Derrida as the model of an *arkheion* type archive: representing in its function the dual private/public nature of the space and a paternalistic power structure. Indeed, we can see the process of transformation in a tangible manner through the photographs depicting the then/now divide, the explanatory signs, and ropes marking thresholds. Yet, the question remains, whether we could ever consider the space a fully private home. By Derrida's definition, this home had always been shifted into the *archtonic*, in being both the site of commencement and commandment: the site of origin for psychoanalysis as science, the patriarchal law. In this way, the space and its function have merely been preserved and evolved as the primary focus.

### 1.1.3 In the Freud Museum

Hiller, in her discussion around the work and site initially tends towards Derrida's assertion that the space has metamorphosed in a fundamental way, from the domestic to the institutional:

"This is a space which was a family home and has become a museum – or a shrine, depending on how you look at it – and which itself houses the collection of the original inhabitant. So it has layers and layers and layers of meaning in the present, as well as a very significant past."<sup>19</sup>

On elaboration, Hiller reflects on the collections in place within the Freud home whilst

---

<sup>18</sup> Steedman, *Dust*, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Susan Hiller, Lucy R. (Lucy Rowland) Lippard, and Barbara Einzig, *Thinking about Art: Conversations with Susan Hiller* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 226, <http://prism.talis.com/mmu/items/772393>.

the family were still resident. By placing the grave artefacts of extinct cultures - haunted and resonant objects - around the house, Freud himself shifted the meaning and experience of being resident within those rooms. These objects in particular shift across the boundaries described by Derrida. Whilst owned by Freud they held the status of a collection - indigenous artefacts acquired by Freud for his own gratification. Yet now their primary value is marked by having once been owned by Freud, and how that ownership might affect our understanding of his life and work - which shifts them towards the status of the archive. These objects highlight how fluid these boundaries of archive - museum - collection might be, and that their status can change over time.

The artefacts and remnants of the Freud family are housed within the museum and archive at the house; the collections of ephemera, personal libraries and archived manuscripts and working materials belonging to both Sigmund and Anna Freud. The draft manuscripts and notebooks contained exemplify an archive 'proper' (and until recently it was heavily restricted in providing access to researchers). The house itself is more problematic. Objects from the archive are on display, and despite their archival qualities these belongings and all the other ephemera of the Freud's domestic setting, provide an effect less like a museum, and more as if a stately home. A home in stasis, preserved yet altered. The archive here is in a different formation to our current definition, connected instead to that archon of Derrida where domestic and paternal authority collide.

This is the setting into which Hiller and Calle intervene, a space further complicated by the addition of their own layers of interpretation and association. In Hiller's work *After the Freud Museum* (1994)<sup>20</sup> this is drawn out further through the manner in which she connects the objects and their placement. Items from Freud's collection and her own are placed in direct juxtaposition, with titles and texts that hint towards connections which may or may not extend beyond their placement together in the boxes.

---

<sup>20</sup> Later the piece was reworked for purchase and display by Tate, retitled *From the Freud Museum* (1991 – 1996), *After the Freud Museum* is also the title of an accompanying publication produced by Bookworks at the time of the show.



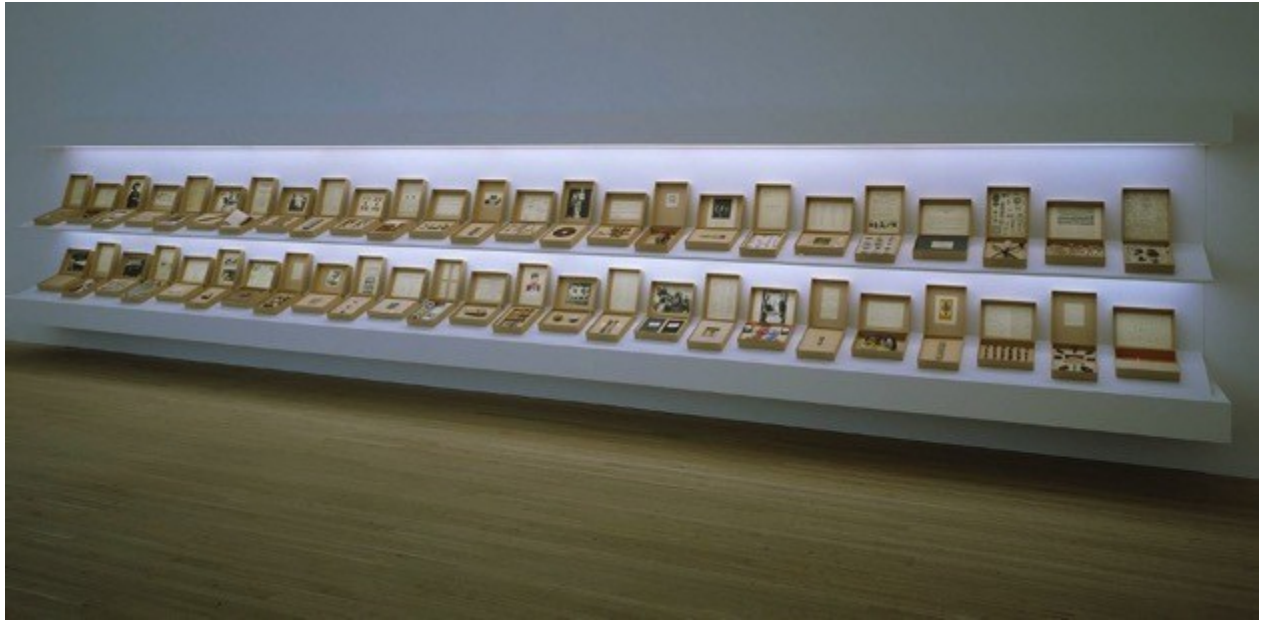


Figure 1: Susan Hiller, *From the Freud Museum* (1991-6)

Dialogues between objects are deliberately created by Hiller, using her own intuition rather than the pre-mediated rules of the archivist's profession. The shift from a personal collection to a public artwork occurs here for both Hiller and Freud's ephemera. Within the work the less important, the kitsch, and aesthetic elements of the archive are placed together - the higher status professional and personal papers having been archived according to standardised methods long before. The objects remaining and featured here are the problematic ones, between the boundaries of museum, collection - and now - art installation. They are marked with the traces (ones we cannot read) of previous ownership and purpose, which now informs their placement against other items. Hiller herself describes the work as intervening within the Freud Museum, "A box within a vitrine within a room within this institutional space within this house – one is attempting to carve out a space in which something else can happen, to make some kind of intervention."<sup>21</sup> However the precise description of method by the artist, and how the work should be characterised, is an area of tension occurring frequently when discussing the display of archival type work, which often might be characterised as a

<sup>21</sup> Hiller, Lippard, and Einzig, *Thinking about Art*, 231.

collection instead.

Hiller's numerous boxes adapt and draw meanings from Freud's collection of objects. Through placement and association these items are connected with themes Hiller gives to each box. She describes the constellations of these objects as the beginning of a process which leads the viewer through a narrative journey:

“... the framing of the objects, the finding of the right word or words and the finding of the image, map, text, diagram, or whatever, was a way of contextualising the objects, not to limit their meanings but to open them out...”<sup>22</sup>

The artefacts contained juxtapose Hiller and Freud's collections, creating meaning through these connections. The box *Cowgirl* uses the multiple potential meanings of the 'cow' and its association to the feminine as its focus. A photograph of the 'cowgirl' criminal Jennie Metcalf posing with an oversized pistol is placed against two ceramic milk jugs shaped as cows. The multiple levels of sexual connotations, alongside representation and connection to ideals of motherhood and the feminine are at work within this one box. Hiller references the perceived innocence of these objects, and by placing them together suggests the potential to demonstrate the opposite,

“... putting these china cows together with this armed cowgirl in the Freud Museum seemed to me a way of dealing with sexual insult, and there was a particular pleasure for me in sitting this in the house of the father.”<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 232.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 231.



Figure 2: Susan Hiller, *After The Freud Museum* (1994) - detail of box *Cowgirl*

Calle went on to work within the house through the *Appointment* exhibition (1999) and publication. Like Hiller, Calle brought her own objects into the space, connecting them to those of the Freud family. In the work Calle's artefacts were placed within the domestic space alongside texts describing personal (and possibly fictitious) memories connected to them. These items were not framed or enclosed in vitrines, and so

intervened directly within the domestic environment without the separation that is more usually evident. A dialogue between Freud and Calle exists throughout the house, at times we wonder if she is speaking directly to him, as a patient or a lover. The objects, in their association to these personal accounts of events become totemic and loaded with significance. Their confessional and personal nature also implicates the Freudian model of the case study, with the patient's (in this case Calle's) fixation on the physical representation of their desire or repressed memory.

### 1.1.4 The Uncanny

In reflecting on the Freud house, Hiller specifically identifies its nature as an uncanny space, an observation also present in Calle's use of the space. Hiller, in speaking about her time within the house, reflects on Freud's work *Das Unheimliche*, which connects the notion of home with a sense of the uncanny through its etymological links in the German language. (Home as *heim*, and uncanny as *unheimlich*).

"... in Freud's essay on the uncanny he says something that in English seems very paradoxical, that the *heimlich* and *unheimlich* are very close."<sup>24</sup>

Here, the notion of the uncanny shelters within the home, just as Derrida sheltered the archive within the domestic space through the *arkhe*. It also encloses the contradictory duality of *heim/unheimlich*. As Hiller describes this process the *heim* that leads to the derivative *heimlich* can, alongside the domesticated references, be translated as secretive, furtive, hidden - and thereby merging into the contradictory 'uncanny', "you suddenly get to *unheimlich* without any break."<sup>25</sup> Here, the language functions as Derrida's argument does within *Archive Fever* - it takes two seemingly contradictory oppositions and demonstrates that they shelter, or become, one another.

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 233.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Hiller demonstrates this within her work at the Freud Museum through the box titled *Heimlich*, juxtaposing the personal object of a record of the song *Look Homeward, Angel*, "... a song about death under the guise of love or desire...".<sup>26</sup> Hiller describes the process of constructing these boxes following a trail of personal associations and connections, rather than any logical ordering system. As a result these small tokens and souvenirs, which can be linked to Freud's own, ones which seem to have "personal resonance" are the ones which remain, often hinting towards this domestic sense of the uncanny, significant memento.<sup>27</sup> The exhibition was constructed by Hiller plundering both her own and Freud's collected objects, and in the vast array of displayed ephemera Hiller hints toward the uncanny that is present also in this drive to surround oneself with these totemic objects. With the drive to collect (the archive fever of Derrida) firmly placed within the domestic setting, we begin to observe how it might connect to a sense of the uncanny in its compulsive, yet seemingly innocent desire.

Calle's interventions within the Freud house resonate particularly with a sense of this uncanny, both in the objects and texts displayed. The furtive, implicit (at times explicit) references to female sexuality present within the recounted memories, replays as a patient of Freud's might connect the everyday objects of the home with darker recollections. This displaced familiarity, projected onto the Freud house mingles with the sense of *Das Unheimliche*; that the uncanny, far from being unfamiliar, is experience separated, denied, forgotten, so when recounted jolts an uncertain, faltering type of memory. These sheltered, elusive origins that exist within the term archive and are present here within the home with secret and uncanny both existing within each other.

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 234.



Figure 3: Sophie Calle, *Invitations*, 1999.

Sven Spieker in *The Big Archive*, connects the Freudian uncanny with the function of the archive, yet he does not point to the assimilation of the terms and their duality in the way that Hiller does. In drawing together the home, archive and notion of the uncanny, Spieker does separate the family home from the official *archeion*, via the absence of this *unheimlich*. "Archives do not record experience so much as its absence; they mark the point where an experience is missing from its proper place."<sup>28</sup> This, according to Spieker, relates the sense of uncanny firmly within the domestic family home, and the official nature of the *arkheion* prohibits such occurrences. Within these dwellings for the archive memorialisation is institutionalised, regulated, and categorised; the nature of remembering shifts to a reliance on documentation, removed from lived experience with all its potential for hidden meanings invested in a space or objects. However, this stance does not account for Derrida's version of the *arkheion*, where the domestic space was dually public/private, or, for instance, the sense of uncanny (uncomfortable familiarity,

<sup>28</sup> Sven Spieker, *Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy* (London: MIT Press, 2008), 3.

doubling) that might take place in archives of poignant everyday objects and scenes.

Freud positions his interest in the uncanny at the beginning of *Das Unheimliche*, as lying in its uncertain and shifting usage, the purpose of his text being to reach a definition. One of the methodologies Freud works with (like Derrida) is to examine the etymological roots and evolving semantics of the term. And, like Derrida, he proposes from the outset a contradictory duality present in both the word and its functionary response;

"...the uncanny is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar. How can this be – under what conditions the familiar can become uncanny and frightening – will emerge in what follows."<sup>29</sup>

Having carried out unsatisfactory research into other language's translations of the term, Freud comes to a lengthy entry in an 1860 German dictionary which in summary states; "Uncanny is what one calls everything that was meant to remain secret and hidden and has come into the open."<sup>30</sup> Again, we are pointed to the duality where *heimlich* and *unheimlich* are able to merge into one another, despite one being the antonym of the other. Both relate to that which is hidden *and* familiar, their opposition is in which is concealed. It is that attempt to remove from view, the repression, that allows for the prefix 'un-'.

Another definition of the terms that Freud discovers is where *heimlich* runs from the domestic and the secrets kept within that place, extending into *unheimlich* where those secret things take a more sinister and frightening turn - that familiar is transformed. Freud also cites repetition as a trait of the uncanny. It can (in certain circumstances) induce a sense of the individual as helpless, without control over a situation. The

---

<sup>29</sup> Sigmund Freud, David McLintock, and Hugh Haughton, *The Uncanny* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 124.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 132.

example provided is that if lost, the individual comes back to where they started from, and in so doing recognises their effort as being hopeless, as though in a dream state. The coincidental repetition of the signs and details fuels the uncanny: chance events that seem to point towards an inescapable, preordained fate. Freud notes the compulsion of the unconscious individual to instigate these repetitions, as a compulsive drive, one strong enough "to override the pleasure principle and lend a demonic character to certain aspects of mental life..."<sup>31</sup>

The compulsive drive, in this context, tends towards creating an uncanny state. This urge to repeat creates another link between the archive and uncanny, in functioning in a way analogous to Derrida's archival drive, both with the looming presence of the Freudian death drive foreshadowing their function.

### 1.1.5 Fever and Death Drive

In discussing the archival fever and the destructive compulsion, Derrida recognises the existence of the death drive as a motivator for the impulse to record: a proximity to death that results in *mal d'archive*. That the potential for destruction exists is acted upon in the impulse to record. To guard against complete obliteration conscious or unconscious traces are made. Yet, as might now be expected, for Derrida the two seemingly opposing drives function in the same manner. The archival drive tends toward repetition in the same way that the uncanny might. There is the same significance placed in signs and details, which occur throughout. As it heightens, this archival drive, tends towards its own destruction. The archival shelters within the death drive as it does the domestic sense of uncanny.

"If there is no archive without consignment in an external place which assures the possibility of memorialisation, of repetition, of reproduction, or of re-

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 145.



impression, then we must remember that repetition itself, the logic of repetition, indeed the repetition compulsion, remains, according to Freud indissociable from the death drive. And thus from destruction... the archive always works, and a priori, against itself."<sup>32</sup>

The recording and repetition of information strengthens an association between the archive and monument, it welcomes the destruction drive since now the trace is retained in an exterior place it is open to threat. According to Derrida's theory, the act of archiving, like the act of writing, becomes central to understanding the archive, alongside the external place of deposition as a requirement, yet it is these conditions (according to Freud's theory) which open the archive to destruction through the death drive, an inherently *anarchivic* force. In Steedman's reflections on Derrida's work it is this notion of the written word that is central:

"Archive Fever explores the relationship between memory and writing (in its widest possible meaning of recording and making marks), and Freud's own attempts to find adequate metaphors for representing memory. Derrida sees in Freud's writing the very desire that is Archive Fever: the desire to recover moments of inception: to find and possess all sorts of beginnings."<sup>33</sup>

This Freudian death drive frames Derrida's discussion of the archival drive, and the intertwined existence of the two is established throughout the text. The *mal d'archive* (archive fever) of the title describes the two operating in unison to destroy one another as a combined drive. It is the compulsive need to record and archive that Derrida views as the link between the archival and death drives, when archive fever allows both to operate; the amassing of records results in, as one, the creation and destruction of the archive. The potential for obliteration is cyclical, and inscribed upon the contradictory nature of these drives, each sustaining the other's existence.

---

<sup>32</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 12.

<sup>33</sup> Steedman, *Dust*, 5.

The death - or destruction - drive itself was recognised by Freud as something more than a principle; as an urge that was overwhelming, all encompassing, yet oddly absent. It is a principle that threatens the existence of others.

"It is at work, but since it always operates in silence, it never leaves any archives of its own. It destroys in advance its own archive, as if that were in truth the very motivation of its most proper movement."<sup>34</sup>

The death drive can obliterate an archive, and with it, the knowledge that an archive was ever present. In this, Derrida repeats Freud's assertion that no trace of the drive ever remains, but that interpretations of traces can exist, disguised and translated, within artistic representations of, or pseudonyms for, the idol: "These impressions are perhaps the very origin of what is so obscurely called the beauty of the beautiful. As memories of death."<sup>35</sup> It is these idols, traces, of the death drive that Freud surrounded his working and living spaces with, the archive of the psychoanalytic science which welcomes in the contradictory force of destruction.

That the archive of Derrida's definition holds a capacity for its own destruction, also links to the presence of artists (and also academics, psychologists and curators) within its space. As a now wholly public once domestic setting it allows for multiple traces as interpretations to exist within that space. In Hiller's seemingly significant collections of ephemera, and Calle's totems of moments passed within this house or another, both suggest the death drive and impulse to destruction as Freud's existing collections of ancient artworks. These objects and their presence within the house speak of the potential excess of the archive, and within which its eventual incapacity.

---

<sup>34</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 10.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

### 1.1.6 Lost Works

This force of the urge to acquire and build an archive simultaneous with the death drive is evidenced in the academic practices of Aby Warburg and Walter Benjamin. Each aimed to author works which collected materials from archived sources in order to create extensive works in their subject areas using collage of these sources to narrate their arguments. Neither of these final grand projects were completed by the artists, for reasons which could be attributed to the drives described by Derrida. Both authors were overtaken by the compulsive need to collect and rearrange their materials to the extent that the projects were never fixed, or in a state of fixity that allowed the specific nature of the work's structure and detail to be finalised. This behaviour and the eventual 'lost' nature of these works is symptomatic of these *anarchival* forces Derrida identifies.

These works, like *Archive Fever*, exist as a ubiquitous presence<sup>36</sup> within archival dialogues and theory. Unfinished works, they paradoxically function as key texts without having been completed, or even existing in the form intended by the authors (both lacking the comprehensive narrative writing which was intended to accompany the montage of source materials). In this manner they might be viewed as aligned with the archive proper – lacking predetermined pathways for the reader which might be expected from the text. As is the case for Derrida's work these pieces are heavily quoted and referenced, but the *notion* of the unfinished opus often seems the appeal, as opposed to the content itself (which is often only discussed in detail by scholars of the two writers, not in the wider context of the archive).

---

<sup>36</sup> It was Benjamin himself who reignited an interest in Warburg during the 1980-90s, when it was found he had referenced *Mnemosyne Atlas* as an influence. Before this Warburg's appeal was limited to art history dialogues around Renaissance, Antiquity and anthropological practices, as opposed to the application of his ideas to contemporary practitioners.



Figure 4: Aby Warburg, Mnemosyne Atlas, Panel 45, *Superlatives of the language of gestures* (1927-29)





Figure 5: Aby Warburg, *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Panel 79, *The Eucharist* (1929)

Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* project was envisaged as a grand project of photo-montage, with 60-70 plates of collaged images with associated commentary, on the classical myths and their recurrence through Renaissance visual culture, into Modernity. As a visual researcher/archivist Warburg recognised patterns which echoed through centuries, and continually re-categorised and ordered these into aesthetic representations (plates). The *Arcades Project* by Benjamin was equally grand in its perceived scope: a history of the 19th Century through the device of Parisian arcades, arguably itself a device for a historiography of history as concept. Varied envisions of this work included sections ordered as though an archive, the argument relayed entirely through quotation, and Benjamin's own writing. Both projects reflect the unwieldy impossibilities of their creators, yet rather than outright failure, each exist through an archival half-life – analysed, and even revered by researchers despite having no concrete form of their own.

The images which exist of the *Mnemosyne Atlas* are photographs of its final iteration, consisting of 63 plates. These black and white images, now held by the Warburg Institute, represent the only comprehensible form through which the work exists (the plates having been broken down, lost and moved to London following Warburg's death, although some of the individual images and materials remain out of formation). The photographs act as documentation of Warburg's practice as a researcher - the plates also featured as props and visual aids in his lectures - demonstrating both the work made in connecting visual materials, and the ultimate lack of any final product beyond these grainy accounts. A body of work which acts as a trace, the *Mnemosyne Atlas* represents both the documentation of a particular methodological approach to working with visual materials, and a mythologised barely decipherable narrative of aesthetic history.

Matthew Rampley's review of the *Mnemosyne Atlas* and *Arcades Project*, contrasts the grand unfinished projects of the two writers, as intrinsically connected in both their aims and approach. Through using the model of the Renaissance Warburg was "using a well-established metaphor, stimuli inscribe themselves on the memory and remain as

traces... which can be reactivated under certain circumstances."<sup>37</sup> The classical motif reoccurring as an iconography of traumatic memory was viewed by Warburg as both primitive reaction and inherited form of knowledge, the aesthetic memory of trauma, and in so doing preserving the memory of the origin experience.

Memory becomes inscribed with emotive and traumatic meaning through visual culture; it was this that Warburg attempted to document. He viewed the 'limit situation' as so extreme that it could create these ciphers and mnemonic motifs of trauma living on not just in the individual but throughout cultures, and transcending ages.

It is Rampley's position that this approach demonstrates a clear link towards Freud's theory of the repetition compulsion in the constant reworking of these aesthetic symbols of trauma by Renaissance artists particularly, in representing a drive which,

"reiterates past experience, functions within a perpetual present; it thus cancels out the temporal basis of memory and acts in the place of what Freud regards as memory proper."<sup>38</sup>

Rampley's identification of the Freudian drive to repetition in the content of Warburg's own process in creating the *Mnemosyne Atlas*. Rather than the repetition drive being fuelled by inherited memories of trauma, the destructive drive overtakes the archival drive, resulting in the lack of progress and ultimately incomplete body of work, as an effect of Warburg's continued re-arrangement of the materials and desire for expansion.

Within Benjamin's practice the archive fever described by Derrida is equally evident. The *Arcades Project* was delayed for years through the writer's impulse to

---

<sup>37</sup> Matthew Rampley, *The Remembrance of Things Past: On Aby M. Warburg and Walter Benjamin* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 2000), 88.

<sup>38</sup> Rampley, Matthew, "Archives of Memory: Walter Benjamin's Arcades Project and Aby Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas," in *The Optic of Walter Benjamin*, ed. Coles, Alex (London: Black Dog Publishing, 1999), 110.

collect every possible material relating to his study, continually identifying additional tangents and categories. This was twinned by Benjamin's desire to constantly rearrange the existing materials, identifying methods to catalogue the various files and sources making up the body of work.

Rampley goes on to speak of collective memory, which has links to Freud's theory of the uncanny in its definition by Rampley, who recognises it as relying "on structures of repetition such as rituals and festivals that serve to secure the basis of a collective identity but which also telescope chronological history into an atemporal mythic past."<sup>39</sup> Here, also, the Arcades Project has deconstructed collective memory, but that of a recent past, with objects and structures still in place. The totemic objects are mass produced toys and clothing, lent uncanny value through their connection to a recent domestic history, now outdated and without owners. Images are understood as symbols of psychological states, and in so doing link to Freud's theory of repetition, repression and the uncanny. Culture, specifically visual culture, is redefined "as a memorial space."<sup>40</sup>

This obsessive and ultimately destructive behaviour also hints towards the untranslatable nature of these implicit markers of memory, they are removed from context and in so doing become transformed and muted no longer satisfying their original purpose. In the repetition across times these sources, although functional within the present, since the initial causal event has passed, their response becomes a compulsive tick rather than action/reaction. With the removal of context comes the destructive and obsessive nature of the twinned death and archival drives.

The academic work around the archive by Derrida, with its associated Freudian context has allowed for an imagining of the structure and situation beyond existing definitions, and into a realm which identifies the archive as a highly instable and threatened body. It both inspires avid obsession and seeks its own obliteration. This tension between the

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.



two states and drives allows for a space where the uncanny and the domestic may also merge, where interventions within the domestic space might challenge the notion of the archival.

Derrida does not specifically address the nature of bureaucratic and official archives beyond acknowledging their context as having shifted the private realm into the public one with the origins of the form. Instead, it is the personal, individual, familial archive which is subject to the passion of the individual with their accompanying drives. Beyond the ordered practice of the professional archivist, or the measured positivistic view of the historian, the archive of Derrida is a shifting body which challenges existing notions of the archival.

### 1.1.7 An Archive Fever?

*Archive Fever* and its surrounding debate has made a marked impact on the practice of artists, as explored later in this chapter. The space which opens between the dualities of the form, both in the tension between the impulse to record and the inevitability of destruction, and the opening up of the uncanny within the domestic space, offer opportunities for both writers and artists to explore the nature of the form. This manner of work challenges the form of the archive and Derrida's reading of it, rather than simply the surface adaption of archival aesthetics, the liminality and duality is exploited through practice.

The work's publication in 1995 (and the lecture of 1994) arguably instigated a series of responses across the humanities and art research and practice specifically. However, Steedman turns instead to Foucault as having initiated that "archival turn" in the 1960s, pre-dating *Archive Fever*.<sup>41</sup> Instead, Steedman interprets the text as reflecting on the Freudian psychoanalytic trait of,

---

<sup>41</sup> Steedman, *Dust*, 2.

“...a desire to recover moments of inception, beginnings and origins which – in a deluded way – we think might be some kind of truth, and in *Archive Fever* desire for the archive is presented as part of the desire to find, or locate, or possess that moment of origin, as the beginning of things.”<sup>42</sup>

This need to identify and retain the moment of origin associated with the archive fever identified by Derrida, might also be reflected in our reading of the work and its effect upon surrounding cultural output. Although many were undoubtedly influenced by the text, it did rework themes which had been established in post-structuralist thought decades earlier, and the subject of the archive was already widely in use by practitioners as diverse as Hanne Darboven, Hans-Peter Feldmann, and Christian Boltanski. Many of the practitioners which this research goes on to discuss were already well established in their use of archival techniques well before 1994, or even pre-dating it by decades in the cases of Aleksandr Rodchenko and Marcel Duchamp. Perhaps, we might instead identify Derrida’s work in galvanising a trend already existing within theoretical and artistic cultures, giving it a name, and attempting to pinpoint an origin (even if it is not entirely accurate in doing so).

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 3.

## **1.2 The Historian's Archive**

The archival profession, quite removed from Derrida's loose application of the term 'archive', have a number of guidelines and principles which shape their custodianship. Their practice offers an alternative vision of the archive, and the historical shifts within it also marks wider changes in how the archive was understood and employed. In this context the archive is envisioned as source material used by historians in the main. (It may also be conceived as a purely bureaucratic tool for business and local governance.)

In reaching the current model of the archive a number of evolutions of the form took place. Now it is recognised as only one of a number of potential forms through which memory and the details of history might be present within. Ricoeur has worked with this notion, tracing the form of historic knowledge to a state before the archive – back to the monument and oral histories. Despite these numerous forms, today, it is the archive that has come to dominate above other modes of remembrance. It has come to provide the narrative basis for our retelling of history.

This part explores how sources of knowledge exist within the archive, as documents or traces, and reviews the history of the archival form itself, tracking the changes in attitude towards the archive and its impact on how we might view the communication of knowledge and associated narratives.

### **1.2.1 A History of the Archive**

As a tool and method for research the archive requires writing as the main, dominant form of its documents, according to the accounts of the form given by Derrida and historian philosophers such as Le Goff and Ricoeur. In this, the archive's weaknesses are recognised – that the written archive can only represent one form of knowledge, one of a literate elite. Even the manner in which these documents are read and accessed is 'other' from the experience of that original moment. Unlike the oral tradition "there is no

unmediated, raw, collective memory.”<sup>43</sup>

We can track two key shifts that led to the model of the archive developing as we would now recognise it: the move from oral to written knowledge, and the later shift from the monument to document as historical signifier. This first development took place many centuries before the first recognisable archives, but was central in allowing human memory to be located away from the body, in another (more permanent and unchanging) form. In a stance which is challenged by current readers Le Goff marks this as an entirely positive shift; as from the perspective of the historian this ends the mysticism previously associated with the act of recollection in early civilisations, and potentially leaves records that might be copied or preserved. Ricoeur describes this change in how historical narratives are recorded as,

"The moment of the archive is the moment of the entry into the writing of the historiographical operation. Testimony is by origin oral... the archive is written. It is read, consulted.”<sup>44</sup>

This view of testimony and the ways in which embodied, oral knowledge is included within the archive is a complex issue. Ricoeur hints toward a view that these forms might be easily transcribed, or included as recorded media. However, many other academics (and particularly those working with embodied practices, or voices typically excluded from the archive) might argue that this need to create documents undermines, and ultimately ends the practice of passing on this cultural knowledge in its original form.

The second development in the evolution of the archive was the move away from the monument as marker of memory, and instead towards the document. Ricoeur notes Le Goff's entry in *Enciclopedia Einaudi*, titled *Documento/Monumento*<sup>45</sup>, which informs us

---

<sup>43</sup> Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory*, (Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1992), 59.

<sup>44</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, (London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 166.

<sup>45</sup> Jacques Le Goff, "Documento/Monumento," *Enciclopedia Einaudi* (Turin: Einaudi, n.d.).

that “archives were for a long time designated by the term ‘monument’.”<sup>46</sup> The movement away from the monument came about at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, coinciding with the foundation of archives as we would now recognise them. A marked trend towards the positivist methods in historical studies (and academic thought in general) “marked the triumph of the document over the monument”<sup>47</sup> according to Ricoeur. The monument was recognised in usually being made in order to commemorate what the wealthiest members of society, or those in power, thought most important, what was “judged worthy of being integrated into collective memory.”<sup>48</sup> Conversely, the document was viewed as having a greater level of impartiality; the documents were the outcome of everyday legal, social and bureaucratic process, and as such more accurately reflected the society that produced them. Yet later critique of this shift recognised that the type of document collected by those official archives still reflected only the interests of those in power, those who introduced the systems by which the documents were created. Although the oral tradition both pre-dates and continues these physical forms, it is largely dis-regarded by these studies of the historical form, requiring encoding within documentary forms (audio recording etc) to be recognised as valid source material and allowed into the archive.

This critical stance sought to “discover the monument hiding behind the document”<sup>49</sup>, which went deeper than that initial positivist favouring of the document over monument, questioning how the unseen privilege might operate within this new type of archive. On elaboration, Ricoeur ends his analysis agreeing with Le Goff, stating that “once its apparent meaning is demystified”<sup>50</sup> the document is indeed another type of monument.

---

<sup>46</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 3*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (London: University Of Chicago Press, 1990), 118.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

### **1.2.2 The Archival Profession**

Although Derrida turns to the etymology of the archive and places its origins in ancient civilisation, the narrative of archivist practice points to the founding of national archives in Northern Europe in the 19th Century as when the model was founded. These collections were state run, heavily bureaucratic systems aligned with those in power. They also were mainly composed of official documentation, ignoring the rich oral culture and traditions of their country's citizens. Much of the regulations which dictate the practice of archivists were established in accordance with this system - and until relatively recently remained unchallenged, although waves of transition have occurred (and are mapped out below), they only amount to slight changes in perspective rather than complete overhauls. Not only shaping the practice, the early models also dictated what an archive might be, leading to small or unconventional archives (those of artists for example) being overlooked or mishandled in accordance with these ill-fitting methods. However, newer techniques for working with these types of archive are now being tested and disseminated, potentially leading to a governance style adapted to the specific needs of each body, moving on from the larger bureaucratic model.

Despite recent shifts in thinking, in charting the foundations of the archivist's practice the 19<sup>th</sup> Century systems of order first established the profession, and continue to influence it today. The role of the archivist is central in determining the order and description of documents (for instance in which categories they are placed, or how they are juxtaposed within the catalogue), and as such they critically influence how these historic sources are read. As the role has developed it has expanded to include assisting researchers and members of the public in searches, curating displays of material in exhibition format, and producing detailed catalogues of previously uncharted archives. In understanding further the foundations of the practice we can begin to establish the narrative the profession tells itself; where it establishes its own history, and what remains as the most essential elements in its practice today.

A document focused, positivist view of history moulded the form of archives, the effects

of which are still evident. When archives as we might recognise them first began to be established in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, this philosophical stance of the age was reflected in the emphasis on document based forms of knowledge, which required official validation. Far from Derrida's sweeping potential of the form, the initial founders of archival practice were based in the bureaucratic systems of local governance. As such, the text which established the model European archive – the *Dutch Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*<sup>51</sup> – deals numerous and clear edicts, beginning with;

Rule 1. "The foundation upon which everything must rest" is the description of the archive as, "the whole of the written documents, drawings and printed matter, officially received or produced by an administrative body or one of its officials".<sup>52</sup>

This initial description of the archive establishes it within governmental, bureaucratic and business spheres, from the outset it was not viewed as a personal or creative entity. Although images might be included they tended still towards the official; architects plans, maps, etc.

The document focused positivist view of history moulded the shape of archives, the effects of which are still evident today. This model reflects the way in which knowledge was perceived at the time (the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century) as a document based form, requiring official validation. Some of the impetus for creating this initial model came in response to a crisis – an overabundance of clerical records, legal documentation and bureaucratic papers resulted in what Beniger termed the Control Revolution of 1880 - 1930. The centralisation and standardisation of European governance was made

---

<sup>51</sup> Despite borrowing heavily from existing models (particularly those of French and German archivists) the 1898 Manual is widely acknowledged as laying the foundations of the profession. The text proposes the principles of governance in one hundred rules written with immense specificity and detail by a team of three archivists and an overseeing professional review board.

<sup>52</sup> Samuel Muller, Robert Fruin, and Johan Adriaan Feith, *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives: Drawn Up by Direction of the Netherlands Association of Archivists*, trans. Leavitt, Arthur H. (New York: H.W. Wilson Company, 1940), 13–20, 33–35, 52–59. The following rules quoted are from Terry Cook's interpretation of the text, as found in 'What is Past is Prologue'.

possible by advances in communication and record keeping technologies, but this same process led to "an uncanny loss of control", where simply too many documents were produced than could be handled and ordered. Through the carbon copy in particular the typewriter had "intensified the crisis it was designed to conquer."<sup>53</sup> As the bureaucratic organisations continued to produce content, the newly founded profession of archivists began to create systems to order and retain it all as a response to this shift in governance.

One central and enduring element of archival professional theory has been the 'principle of provenance', included within the Manual, having already been established as a significant technique in Berlin since 1881. It was re-articulated within the text as:

Rule 16. The arrangement "must be based on the original organisation of the archival collection, which, in the main, corresponds to the organisation of the administrative body that produced it". This lays out the principle of Original Order within the archive, viewed by the authors as, "the most important of all... from which all other rules follow".

This rule establishes the premise that however idiosyncratic the ordering systems of the earlier custodian, it should remain in place once in the custody of the archivist. In particular, this principle has remained a central concern within artistic practice. This reflects some of the importance of how documents are configured in their reading, and the potential connections to be made between the individual documents. The original text, and the archival profession since, have placed an emphasis on the original context within which documents are created and found, as essential to their meaning, reflected in the enduring nature of this instruction.

However, the principle and Manual in general did overlook and fail to pre-empt some of the challenges to the archival profession. In terms of provenance, many situations arise

---

<sup>53</sup> Spieker, *Big Archive*, 5.



where a third party has intervened before the archivist, thus stripping away the perceived 'authenticity' of original order. In the case of artists this interruption usually occurs when the executor of the estate might pack away the study and studio materials into boxes making their own selections of what is 'rubbish' or worth keeping, or perhaps they remove personal, potentially controversial documents such as diaries and correspondence. The order is often also removed in the case of the archives held by small arts organisations, with a general lack of knowledge or certainty as to what has been kept.<sup>54</sup>

The limitations of the Manual was due in part to the experience of the archivists who oversaw either limited historical 'closed' archives, or already well ordered small scale governmental department records. In Cook's opinion "these principles have sometimes been too rigidly defended or too literally interpreted", despite the opinion of the report's authors that their own work was intended as a flexible set of guidelines.<sup>55</sup> The large and sprawling enterprises and overabundance of documents witnessed by Beniger were not foreseen. Small scale archives of individuals and groups were not catered for by the Manual, but were also viewed as beneath the attentions of such a guide (instead focused on preserving rare and ancient works, or the archives of the state). Instead, the Manual directs smaller archives to the attentions of libraries and care of librarians; reflecting the positioning of many such bodies still today within the libraries of art schools and universities, although now authenticated and recognised as archives.

The emphasis on provenance and the preservation of original order continued beyond the Manual and into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century with the work of Sir Hilary Jenkinson established as a secondary key influence upon the profession. According to Jenkinson each archive

---

<sup>54</sup> Having spent time working with the archive holdings of the Cornerhouse, Manchester (specifically those relating to exhibitions), the records had been moved from office to office before a final move to a storage facility, boxes were mislabelled or files out of order where they had later been accessed, cataloguing projects had been started on certain sections of the archive, and there were issues around securing the materials within the archive from damage and decay. For a small to mid-scale arts organisation this situation does not appear to be unique, particularly since specific funding is often not available to rectify these issues.

<sup>55</sup> Terry Cook, "What Is Past Is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift," *Archivaria* 1, no. 43 (December 2, 1997): 3.

was an 'organic whole', already by definition complete, and each element essential in its original place not to be reinterpreted by later custodians. This view of the archive as what should be an untainted account, ignores their fluid – and indeed organic – nature as collections which with use and misuse are shifted and adapted into variations of themselves. However, Jenkinson had trained with Medieval closed archives in the same manner as the Manual's authors, shaping his views as conservationist and an idealised vision of the archivist as: "the most selfless devotee of Truth the modern world provides."<sup>56</sup>

Although his views are considered out-datedly positivistic by many, Jenkinson has experienced a revival of sorts both in inspiring belief in the importance of the profession, and by being relevant to the organisation of small personal archives: closed and restricted like his medieval models. In this way Jenkinson might provide a model for the handling of archives which map artistic practice.

The two foundations of the profession found in the Manual and Jenkinson mirror the patriarchal system of order associated with Derrida's description of the earliest Greek *archons*. The same positivistic focus upon documents (particularly written ones), and their official nature in upholding local governance is reflected in the parallel descriptions. Both have a focus upon the role of the archivist as keeper of law, of truth and with it an associated responsibility to both the documents and the wider society within which they are situated. However, as the form developed so too did this positivistic viewpoint, and the archivist began to be recognised as a figure who could potentially bias the reading of documents.

As archival practice moved into the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, practices were redeveloped particularly in the United States. New models of thought emerged here particularly as archivists and historians had less training or access to closed historic archives, coupled with an overabundance of contemporary documents. This resulted in "the emphasis of

---

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 4.23, Jenkinson quoted by Cook.

archives work [being] shifted from preservation of records to selection of records for preservation."<sup>57</sup> A 'life cycle' system was developed for documents in which the records were used and organised by their creators, then stored for a time by the organisation, then handed onto archivists for selection and preservation. Schallenberg, the US archival theorist believed that this appraisal was the key role of archivists, in selecting records based on their "usefulness... for the larger documentation of American life".<sup>58</sup> This method of pre-empting the interests of future historians has led to contemporary criticism, according to Ham establishing

"a selection process... so random, so fragmented, so uncoordinated, and even so accidental... that too often reflected narrow research interests rather than the broad spectrum of human experience."<sup>59</sup>

Tension emerged between the two models of thought: one grounded in the stance of the early conventions, keeping all records entirely and intact, the other a contemporary response to issues of storage, navigability and user friendliness. These differences were played out in the debate over the disposal of records by archivists.<sup>60</sup>

Within these two approaches to the practice we might observe the mirroring of a balance between the archive fever of Derrida and the destructive death drive of Freud. The earlier stance of the Manual and Jenkinson (built around the closed archive), places an emphasis on the retention and preservation of materials in their original state, yet within the context of modern holdings facing an excess of content, the compulsive need to retain that information can ultimately also lead to the body becoming unwieldy and incomprehensible. The Dutch Manual, if followed precisely, leads to a situation where an excess of material renders the whole unnavigable. In contrast, a system which allows for the selected destruction of records might lessen the overwhelming

---

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 29, Ham quoted by Cook, from *The Archival Edge*, in 'Modern Archives Reader', 328-9

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> As opposed to record management professionals who were in place at large businesses and organisations, already carrying out this duty before the documents reached the archivist.

qualities of an archive, but with it risks the destruction of records which may hold future value, and disrupts the state of the archive as supposedly raw source material. The destruction of records also risks the opening up of voids where information no longer remains, which cannot be perceived to make note of what has gone. As Derrida writes on the destructive drive as anarchivic force: it leaves no trace of itself. The risk of destroyed records is that their absence goes unmarked. In order for the archive to function they must remain recorded as a lack, and aporia. If there is no trace at all left of them within the archive, we would not know or recognise what has been excluded through that absence.

Moving against the tension of this debate around disposal, into the later 20<sup>th</sup> Century the archival profession reacted through a refocusing upon the record's context. Although provenance had never been forgotten, its re-emphasis as a central tenet provided a focus for the archivist. Studies increasingly focused on the document and archive as a product of the society which created them. As such they were less positivistic ideals, or the *archon* keepers of law, but instead increasingly viewed as a series of records with acknowledged interrelationships between individual documents and entire archives. This shift into a post-positivistic stance began to reflect some of the wider dialogue around the archive and its component elements, and also allowed for information to become increasingly navigable through clearly marked connections between the holdings.

The archival profession recognised that the documents under their custodianship were a product of their wider context, and should equally be recognised as being read in a differing way through eras and the context of their own society. In the same way, these shifts in the archival profession reflect how the archive itself is viewed as a form of knowledge and memory within cultures. As Cook stated, archival theory has always reflected the wider values of the society within which it is created, be that empirical positivism or postmodernism;

"archival principles are not fixed for all time, but, like views of history itself,

or literature, or philosophy, reflect the spirit of their times and then are interpreted anew by succeeding generations."<sup>61</sup>

These shifts recognised the increased specialism within archival practices, indicating that the guidelines and best practice have been increasingly be adapted to suit differing types of archive. The role of the archivist has slowly adapted from passive keeper to "active shapers of historical knowledge",<sup>62</sup> aware of their own presence and affect upon the archive itself.

### 1.2.3 Creative Archiving

Within the last decade a number of experimental and creative projects using smaller archives have begun to emerge from the UK. It is within these sorts of archives, usually belonging to an individual or a small organisation that experimental and innovative techniques for archiving may be tested, particularly in the arts field. These organisations have generally been awarded small seed funding to undergo research into the archives, or based within universities which allow for funds for this work to be made available. The Art Libraries Society, and in particular the Art Archives Committee have charted these projects, and connect a network of arts archives across the country.<sup>63</sup>

This has been carried out most notably in the work of Athanasios Velios working with the John Latham archive housed at Lambeth College. Velios has identified the influence of the archival model outside of his own profession and the need to respond and adapt to this: "post-modern thinking has often been examined in an archival context and there

---

<sup>61</sup> Cook, "What Is Past Is Prologue," 5.

<sup>62</sup> Steedman, *Dust*, 2.

<sup>63</sup> The body now known as the Art Libraries Society (ARLIS), was established in 1969 in response to the number of art specific libraries beginning to be founded in universities, museums and galleries. Although other European countries had founded similar bodies, ARLIS became the standard to which other countries joined or emulated. In these early stages librarians and archivists were part of this same professional body, however as it grew and developed the organisation began to divide by more specific areas of interest. The Art Archives Committee was founded in 1995 as a branch of ARLIS dealing exclusively with artist archives.

is evidence that professional practice has shifted in that direction."<sup>64</sup> Velios also reflects upon Derrida, highlighting the necessary deconstruction of an archive in presenting or falsely establishing any single truth, and other archival theorists in concerns around the conscious selection and intervention of the archivist in the documents. Velios goes on to discuss the open data archive as a solution to this singularity of control and vision, however the model is found to be lacking:

"even in an archive 2.0 arrangement, the archivist, not the public has the power to produce and present data in its official version. Therefore the archivist's view remains the dominant version of the truth."<sup>65</sup>

In considering personal archives there is the opportunity for a move away from the dominant theory based around large organisational systems, into a defined space with potential for creative interpretation. It is recognised that scale is not an issue (the Latham archive is approx. 8000 documents), and in compliance with traditional theory, there is no need to remove any record from the 'organic whole', even if that means some elements remain unprocessed for a time. Velios goes on to position his distinct theory:

"...arrangement and description should be the core subject of deconstructive thinking for artist's archives. Arrangement and description have previously been approached from a deconstruction perspective, but this is only suggested as a state of mind rather than a revised working methodology. In other words, archivists are asked to accept their partiality but are left to continue using methodologies that have been widely criticised for their rigidity and absoluteness."<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Athanasios Velios, "Creative Archiving: A Case Study from the John Latham Archive," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 32, no. 2 (October 2011): 257.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 259.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 260.

The term *Creative Archiving* is coined as a term for this new approach by Velios, “because partiality is unavoidable and since the perceived truth may be changing anyway, let us turn partiality to an advantage.”<sup>67</sup> This solution allows for the archivist to very clearly admit their own presence and view of the material in adding their own layer of interpretation, guiding the reader's navigation of the documents. Here, we see the influence of the archive on postmodern theory cycling back to directly influence the specific practice of the archivist, not only on a simply conceptual/theoretical level, but in the direct shaping of an archival arrangement.

Alongside these conceptual arguments for creative interpretation of archives Velios has also cited some more pragmatic ones: retaining the individuality and character of a small archive, better guiding the reader through the materials, and assisting the smaller collection stand out amongst more expansive or multi stranded archives. The part of modern technology is also recognised in allowing the freedom and means to introduce these new methods of arrangement. This essentially, is down to advances which allow the archivist to separate out the raw metadata descriptions, and the presentation of this data to the reader, creating two separate layers of interpretation, one standard cataloguing of records, and one the creative archive interface.

The Latham archive's arrangement went through a number of evolutions before the correct interpretive layer was reached upon,<sup>68</sup> all were based upon the (pseudo) scientific theories which ran through and informed Latham's practice. However, it became quickly apparent that these theories were too vague and unqualified to manage the data, and instead Velios moved to let Latham's work influence how the archive was experienced. The method used was through the characters of the three eponymous *Brothers Karamazov* of Dostoyevsky's novel, which Latham frequently cited, and the artist's own thoughts on classification (although no such structure had been placed on his own archive whilst alive). The three brothers allowed for three possible layers of

---

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> A number of narrative structures were tested, elements of which were present within Latham's practice, i.e. the notion of 'minits'.

intervention - meeting the needs of three different types of visitor to the archive: a random, casual aesthetic based visit, the specific search of an academic researcher, and the intuitive user (a sub layer based specifically on Latham's theory of order through Time Bases). On the front page of the archive site the visitors are given a choice of these methods through which to explore the archive. Although this presentation shapes how the digital archive is accessed, the physical archive and first level database description all still comply with archival conventions and standards.

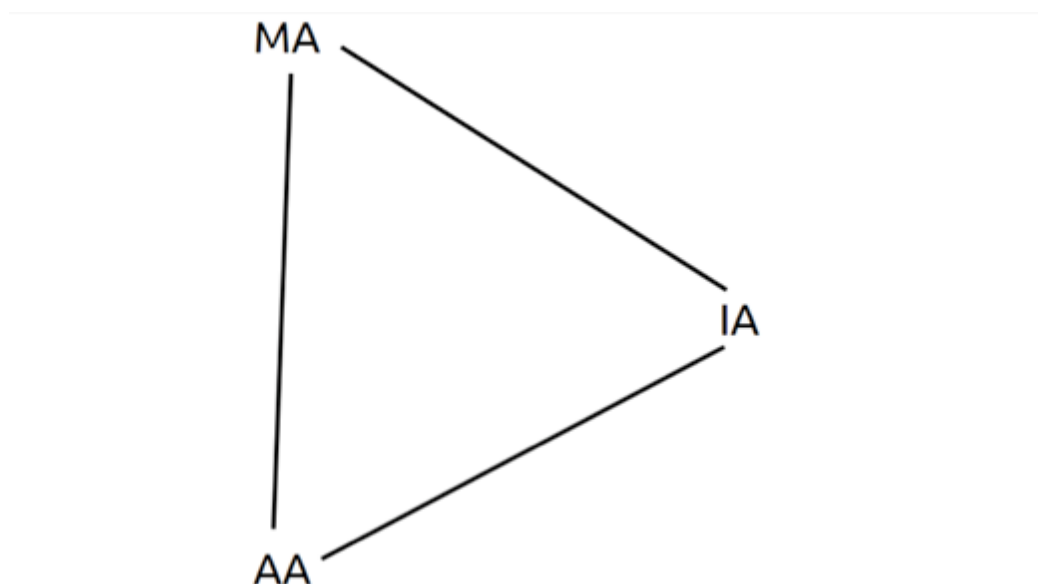


Figure 6: Screenshot, landing page Latham archive, <http://www.ligatus.org.uk/aae/>

Velios views this interpretive layer applied to the archive, as one which "transforms the archive into an educational tool and demonstrates that the archivists work has an impact on users." Criticism aimed at the individual 'truth' and partiality of the archivist is relayed through the up-front admission of the three characters - from the outset the visitor is aware of their guide, the archivist, more so than if accessing the resource without being aware of this inevitable influence in guiding their attention. It is also the case that the Latham archive is using still developing technology in actualising these templates (which allow the raw data to exist in isolation) so rather than being the lone example, they could be described instead as the first to uptake new advances within a developing field.



Velios makes clear he views Latham's archive by no means unique in its potential to be mapped through an alternative manner of arrangement, and that other institutions should begin considering their own methods and adaptations of technology.

"The significance of archives lies not only in the matter of each document, but also in the interrelationship of documents within a group..."<sup>69</sup>

Hodson's statement connects to the work of Velios in that we can observe in action the changing relationship between the documents when using the online interface. Each user is given a different experience – yet the materials remain the same, it is their order which changes producing new meaning and connections within that group.

In the example of the John Latham archive the aim is to produce a unique narrative each time it is accessed online, which occurs through the narrative constructed by viewing records in a particular sequence. Different types of archival record co-exist and create juxtapositions through the pattern of viewing. As Hodson described it is this connection between the elements within the archive, as experienced by the reader, which allows meaning to be created. The work of Velios has particularly recognised this effect, and whilst maintaining the original order of the physical archive allows for a multitude of different juxtapositions to be created for each viewer. A viewer's individual experience is something akin to watching a performance – the archive is creating connections and relationships between documents which cannot be readily repeated.

---

<sup>69</sup> Hodson, John Howard, *The Administration of Archives* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1972), 4. Quoted in Spieker, *The Big Archive*, 18.

### 1.2.4 Trace and the Archive

Within *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 3 the historian and theorist Paul Ricoeur identifies three common properties of the archive, they are; a definitive body of documents, the result or product of an institution, held in a state of conservation or preservation. This attitude of care lends credibility and authenticity to the archive's reputation, just as the documents offer proof to the historical narratives sought by historians. Although the archival profession recognises its holdings as documents or items in their singular form (alongside the catchall term 'ephemera'), there is little discussion examining how the form of these holdings may differ in the ways they record and communicate meaning. Ricoeur uses a categorical approach to identify a structure to some of those elements making up the archive. The taxonomic structure and definitions speak of Ricoeur's experience with a certain type of archive – historic, museological and closed. However, his writing on the concept, make up and implications of these archival elements are relevant across a range of applications, including the artistic, and are particularly relevant in discussions around durational and live art documentation.

"If history is a true narrative, documents constitute its ultimate means of proof. They nourish its claim to be based on facts."<sup>70</sup>

In focusing on records contained within the archive, Ricoeur notes that remnants of the past can be read as historic documents which offer clear factual or legal information, however it is those traces left unintentionally, without an eye to any inherent value, which provide the greatest use for historians and future readers. In recognition of this the search for documents has expanded into broader disciplines and types of records.

Ricoeur also notes the connection between the monument and document (as has already been discussed), with the implication that viewing the document as the only, or preferred, form of archival holdings to take is a troubling stance, as it limits the histories

---

<sup>70</sup> Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Volume 3, 34.

and traditions which might become part of the historical narrative. Recognising the potential shortcomings of the document read in isolation, Ricoeur sets forwards the notion of trace as both contextualising the document, and also enabling another type of record to enter the archive.

"The thought process that begins with the notion of archives, moves on to that of a document (and among documents eye witness testimony), and then reaches its final epistemological presupposition: the trace."<sup>71</sup>

Ricoeur's taxonomic definition of the trace situates the form as a slight yet essential element of the archive. The trace might be easily overlooked, it is a casually discarded marker of a history. As Ricoeur goes on to state the trace is central in understanding how archives are formed and the documents which populate them.

"If archives can be said to be instituted, and their documents are collected and conserved, this is so on the basis of the presupposition that the past has left a trace, which has become the monuments and documents that bear witness to the past."<sup>72</sup>

Ricoeur goes on to negotiate the meaning of 'leaving a trace'. The common interpretation is as a mark which is left, paradoxically, it indicates the something of a past event, without necessarily including any demonstration of who left it, or what occurred. The language (English, and more so French) displays the synchronicity of passed with past. The trace is that essential mark left which may, in the future, become a document. The etymology of 'document' (in French) is described by Ricoeur as to offer support and information. The document provides this in offering the narrative for a historian to follow, to confirm their impressions. This potential aid is not necessarily present in the trace.

---

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 36.

The contradiction of the trace lies in its pointing to a transitory, unknowable event through a fixed sign. Ricoeur's historian's definition of trace identifies pragmatic examples, objects of substance such as the tools and artworks of previous civilisations. Ricoeur defines this divide as evidence of the trace's nature as split between the passage of the fleeting ephemeral moment, and the mark that remains as deliberate production pointing to this passage.<sup>73</sup> The indication that something took place, which the trace demonstrates, is paradoxical in that the marker of the past remains, but that event does not and cannot be decoded.

The connective nature of the trace allows it a temporal existence between the two times. Although the trace belongs to an earlier time, it does not offer a clear pathway to that era. Ricoeur identifies the historian as translator in this situation: they "stand halfway between the initial definition of a trace and its extension into a thing."<sup>74</sup>

The trace is fragile and liable to destruction, it can be obliterated and with it knowledge of the people or events to which it pertained. The events always occurred, yet it is only the preservation of a trace which allows us, here, an insight. The durable mark of effort (conscious production) speaks of a cause separate to the trace, however the two intertwine in the documents deposited by history within the archive.

"The phenomenon of the trace – along with the phenomena of ruins, remains and documents – thus finds itself displaced from the historical toward the intratemporal, that which is 'within-time'."<sup>75</sup>

This notion of intratemporality is central to Ricoeur's definition of the trace, and thereby to the archive also. That the trace is a mark, that might in turn be traced, offers the potential for activation – in following its pathway through time to decode that item, or attempt to at least. Ricoeur notes that others had not reached beyond this point of the

---

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 119.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 38.

paradox when considering traces left. Even Heidegger's understanding of the past and passing, was lacking a solution to the paradox of this past object within the present world, which we recognise as trace. The term 'historical' allows for a better recognition of the present and past contained, whilst Ricoeur suggests considering an 'origin' allows for an increased value and understanding of the trace's function. The trace overlaps the time of an individual, and a wider cosmic time level of enduring stasis and the infinite, it allows a passage, a path, between the two. Ricoeur notes that without the trace, this passage, the narrative of history, comes to a halt.

As an unconscious gesture, existing between then and now, the trace offers a key means of communication and attempted understanding between eras. Its specific meaning may at times be obscured, but as a physical bridge it offers the potential for recognition, the evidence that something has occurred. However, this essential element of the archival structure is not always recognised as such. Ricoeur gives the trace a status in his taxonomy as an equal level with the document (and as an essential element of the evolutionary process of the archive where the trace eventually becomes document), however, this is not always the case. In closed, more ancient archives, traces of the everyday are often viewed as key or even prized elements (the archaeological dig that finds a child's shoe, or the wax writing tablet with shopping list intact), yet in more contemporary archives the overwhelming number of these traces lessens their perceived value and also creates problems around storage. Often they are not retained, or at best loosely contained within a 'Miscellaneous' category. As Steedman defined the archive, it is made up of a mix of both the intentionally documented and the accidental traces that nonetheless sit together in juxtaposition.

"The Archive is not potentially made up of *everything* as is human memory; and it is not the fathomless and timeless place in which nothing goes away that is the unconscious. The Archive is made from selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past and also from the mad fragmentations

that no one intended to preserve and just ended up there.”<sup>76</sup>

The nature of the trace also plays a part in its absence within many archives, particularly those formed earlier in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Archival training’s positivistic leaning toward the document form, lead to the more obscure or slight trace remains being largely not recognised as valid inclusions within the archival body. As the profession has increasingly reflected on its own practice and the archival holdings they oversee, the focus has shifted from rigid document types alone, to a more post-positivistic approach accepting of these other record types.

The trace could be viewed as the usual domain of the museological domain, despite its validity as inclusion within the archive. In the Freud house – that stasis between domestic, museum and archive – the trace objects remain within their domestic setting, with the implication that the context is of value in decoding or understanding the trace, which with a move to the archive means they leave the potential to become even more impenetrable. The glasses and ink-pots on the bureau, books and collected objects are all of a size that could be contained within the ‘official’ archive inaccessible to the public, yet instead they remain in the domestic realm. Not only are they found in this space due to their challenging nature, but also in the sense of authenticity they bring to the domestic museological space. The trace very clearly marks the past presence of the individual (in this this case the Freud house and its contents), adding for the viewer a sense of immediate connection and overlaying of times through this physical presence of the trace object.

The small archives of artists are not usually held in the context of the working environment, so what if any elements of ‘trace’ are included are a matter of debate for both the archivists and estate. Elements such as working materials (paintbrushes, tools), personal effects and ornaments that were kept within the studio (much like Freud’s collection of relics), may not be of obvious and immediate ‘value’ in the way that

---

<sup>76</sup> Steedman, *Dust*, 68.

a letter or sketchbook might be, but can equally offer an insight into the inner and working life of the individual, whilst also offering a tangible connection to their presence.

Beyond illuminating the individual artist's character the trace plays a central role in representing process within the archive. If documents are those elements which depict a finished work or its formal planning: photographs in-situ, a scale model sent to the gallery, the text to accompany a catalogue entry, then the trace illuminates the working practice of the artist in a less conscious way. The trace operates as the mark left. For the working artist this might be as slight as bookmarked pages in a reference text, the note board covered in postcards and clippings, hastily written notes on the back of an event card. These items may not be immediately decipherable taken individually, but within the context of the archive (with its documents and narrative structure) offer the opportunity for greater insights into working practice and process.

### 1.3 The Artists' Perspective

Concurrent with the rise of archival sciences, and the Control Revolution of Beniger, artists too began to use the form and tools of the medium to create work. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century the Surrealist movement and following avant-garde practices began to create works on typewriters and stamp cards, works housed in files and cabinets. This adaptation responded to the increasingly bureaucratic practices invading everyday life by casting them as absurd. It also demonstrates some of the banality associated with this record keeping.

From this early adaptation of the archival form, artists have continued to use the archive as both medium and subject matter within their practice. This study is particularly concerned with those that adapt the form of the archive in attempting to understand its function. From the work of Duchamp to the current archival 'turn', the form has been adapted across a range of disciplines, both in the gallery and as publication or intervention.

#### 1.3.1 The Fragmented Signifier

In a work which illustrates the absent subject and the limits of dialectical language Borges' protagonist of *Funes the Memory Artist* has a memory so detailed and specific, that a dog in profile and head on seem like utterly different beings and moments rather than any common sign; this parodied the de-contextualised series of moments that were accumulated en-masse by the prevailing administrative, archival culture. Equally, the story operates as allegory for Foucault's work on the transgressive. Sven Spieker also recalls the work in his text *The Big Archive*, which frequently refers to artists and writers who test and break down language and signifiers through their archival works. They illustrate the unsuitability of existing modes of documentation of memory and experience, each attempting to create an improved language of signs within a newly created void.



Spieker links Rilke's work *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* to *Funes* in the use of lists of signifiers completely divorced from any understanding or context, a stilted and faltering account of life. This listing of objects and sounds and the random associations are perceived by Spieker to demonstrate

"What happens when there is literally nothing but 'the presence of materials' of which nineteenth-century historians dreamed, without the retrospective, ordering, past-creating, focalising activity of a subject-agent."<sup>77</sup>

Here, we observe the artists and writers of the avant-garde era beginning to employ emergent semiotic theory to question the world surrounding them, and the order of things. The archive with its ordered connections and categories represents a physical demonstration of those qualities the work seeks to undermine and question.

These works demonstrated artistically the result of allowing the will of the archival trend of the time to dominate – all would be recorded as the immediate content without context or retrospective background, this would eventually render the records meaningless and untranslatable by subsequent generations who could not read the signs contained. "...everything is stored, nothing is possessed."<sup>78</sup> This notion of the sign without context recalls the work of a number of artists and writers. Although this essay goes on to explore the use in an artistic context, writers such as Georges Perec and Walter Benjamin both particularly developed a practice which involved the listing and ordering of words as distinct, abstracted signifiers, ultimately rendered meaningless through the process of divorce with the subject. These writing exercises linked both to the archivist, and the avant-garde's appropriation of the conventions.

In the work of Marcel Duchamp and Aleksandr Rodchenko we see a process of artistic enquiry into the notion of the abstracted, fragmented signifier which pertains to nothing.

---

<sup>77</sup> Spieker, *Big Archive*, 78.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 79.

Each has come to different understandings; Duchamp revelling in the meaninglessness of the subject, its liability to break apart and reveal this vulnerability, which Rodchenko recognises but attempts to work against by creating a new, multi-faceted monument of signs. The diversity of response reflects the subject's importance and prevalence in artistic practice, particularly in marking the place of durational or live art, which both begin to touch upon in the process of memorialisation within an artistic archive.

In Duchamp's ready-mades (a Deleuzian working of the smallest possible interval moment), Spieker recognises the work as questioning "whether there can be such a thing as an encounter with time, or an archive of such an encounter."<sup>79</sup> However, Duchamp subverts the ordering of time, and randomizes or completely rejects the historical context. The use of the homely item is present as the familiar transformed, now reminding the viewer of a fractured and temporal shift in this domestic setting (i.e. the uncanny).

"... the contingent present cannot be archived: first, because we cannot speak it without slippage and, second, because there is no point in time that could be said to be independent from what preceded it or from what follows it."<sup>80</sup>

With this notion the rigid sequential understanding of the passage of time as a structured, comprehensible system, is shifted to a disordered state, which the ready-mades (according to Spieker) work to re-order. By succumbing to decay they carefully measure time and moments against their own materiality this process of disintegration overwhelms any preservation drive, "any effort to graph, measure or symbolically encode time."<sup>81</sup> A view which carries through to Duchamp's use of text, where letters and words become discrete signifiers shifting along trajectories, changing meaning. Words selected as abstractions, words without fixed subject or reference.

---

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 82.

"...Duchamp points out, first, that writing, the most classical of archive media, is made up of material signifiers just as a comb is made up of a series of teeth. In such a series individual letters are defined not by what they mean but by the intervals that separate each one from the next."<sup>82</sup>

Spieker views Duchamp's work as embracing and creating vagaries, welcoming chaos and rupture into the sequence, presenting a fractured interpretation of time. Duchamp uses words as a sequence to be disrupted and the meaning obscured, for example, in *The*: 'the' is removed from text and replaced with \*. This disrupts the readers flow and coherency of the piece, even though we are to discover there was no intrinsic meaning ever present in the writing. "By producing a text structured by unreadable omissions... Duchamp stubbornly leads us back to the material signifier, the archival mark itself."<sup>83</sup>

"...the ready-mades represent steadily diminishing archives, archives whose power to act as evidence or to control and measure time is tied up in a continuous process of diminution whose material traces are pervasive gaps and omissions."<sup>84</sup>

Another, later example of this trend toward the fractured signifier in Eastern European work is Aleksandr Rodchenko's proposal for Lenin's memorial in 1928, in the form of the essay, *Against the Synthetic Portrait, for the Snapshot* which positioned that the most fitting tribute would not be in bronze or painting, but a file featuring a number of photographs of the late leader. Rodchenko reasoned,

"Today people do not live by the encyclopaedia, but by the newspaper, the catalogue of articles, brochures, and directories... That is Lenin... and show me where and when it could be said of an artistic synthetic work: this is the

---

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 83.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 84.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 85.

real V.I. Lenin. There is none. And there will not be any... this file with photographs does not allow anyone to idealize or manipulate Lenin..."<sup>85</sup>

This proposition by Rodchenko, in the view of Spieker evolves both painting and the Surrealist photomontage through its "discrete sets of data"<sup>86</sup> reflecting upon the increased use of the photograph within bureaucracy, and a move away from heavily manipulated imagery to an embrace of the inherent realism of the form. Spieker likens this proposed action to the creation of a monument, where the subject, Lenin, is remembered through image overlaid upon image, writing an aesthetic, multi-faceted whole working against the loss of Lenin, against the slippage of memory.

The discretionary images of the work make up the monument, creating, turning to the theory of Barthes a mythology through the archive/artwork:

"In Barthes' understanding, myth is a semiological system to the second degree that speaks about a preceding set of signs in terms that reduce them to a universal signified. Understood as myth, all of the constituent images in Rodchenko's file add up to an authentic, unchallenged, and hence monumental representation of Lenin's life."<sup>87</sup>

However, this reading by Spieker is built on an assumption that the viewer does read these monumental signs without a challenge of the vision they are given. Rodchenko turns the image of Lenin into a sign, yet the viewers might interpret these layers and repetition of that symbol differently than if only one monumental image (as for instance a sculpture) was given. Instead, the multiplicity of these signs hints toward a number of potential interpretations, their sheer numbers offering that possibility.

Rather than being the end point, the subject of the archive/monument becomes the

---

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 88.

mythical, as an individual to which constituent signs point. This work by Rodchenko may not have been directly criticising the former leader but did represent the possibility to alter depictions, creating a new, alternative form of the monument, unauthorised by any state, which could begin to create new mythologies. Spieker goes on to contrast Rodchenko's theory with that of Siegfried Kracauer, interpreting his 1927 essay as stating,

"Photographs made sense so long as there is still a living memory of what they show: once that memory fades, they reveal their true nature as archives of disconnected signifiers whose integration and assimilation, as myth or otherwise become more and more difficult."<sup>88</sup>

This linking of photography and the archive could equally apply to the printed document and dead languages, they are only coherent in their immediate form – that of the moment of writing or speaking – and later that meaning dissipates, historical understanding becomes lost and a retrospective attempt to decode meaning takes place, rooted in the reader's present moment. When the focus of the archive, or myth is moved from the present, according to Kracauer, the 'whole' of the subject of the image is weakened and dissipates, the viewer sees only component parts that make up this whole, but can no longer read them successfully, "the photograph gathers fragments around a nothing."<sup>89</sup> Spieker goes on to join together the opposing theories of Barthes and Kracauer, through Freud's theory of the uncanny: the personalising, or distancing effect of the archived images to be the two opposing elements, the both welcoming and familiar, and unsettling and disturbing intertwined nature of the uncanny.

---

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 143.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 90.

### 1.3.2 Archival Impulse

Derrida is credited with framing the discussion around the archival within the humanities disciplines through the publication of *Archive Fever*, as such Hal Foster is also often cited as being the first to define this trend within contemporary art practice with the publication of *An Archival Impulse* in 2004. As is the case for Derrida's text, Foster's may be considered as a ubiquitous presence within the discourse on archives in contemporary art practice. The phrase 'Archival Impulse' has been widely used as a referent for the trend toward archival themes, yet the essay itself is infrequently interrogated as a source for this argument, beyond (again) a selection of limited citations which are scattered throughout papers.

Although establishing a background of the appropriation of archival and museological methods in previous eras, Foster marks this contemporary prevalence of the archive as having a "distinctive character".<sup>90</sup> These differences are defined by Foster as being in the revival of lost narratives, made present through the work (and allowing for these to be "alternative knowledge or counter memory"),<sup>91</sup> whilst also questioning notions of authorship in the use of 'found' content, as formed in present yet fragmented content. The artists Foster focuses on within the essay are Thomas Hirschhorn, Sam Durant and Tacita Dean, who he believes "share a notion of artistic practice as an idiosyncratic probing into particular figures, objects and events in modern art, philosophy and history."<sup>92</sup> This description of their practice seems especially loose, and by preceding the names of multiple artists with their nationality Foster appears to be pointing to a global trend (the examples are, however, all European and North American.) The selection of just three artists to focus upon feels slight especially since the others mentioned are simply namechecked, rather than integrated into any particular aspects of his argument.

---

<sup>90</sup> Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse," *October* - (2004): 3.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

Although Foster initially leans towards cynicism in describing the “cobbled together” and “funky” of much contemporary adaptation of the archival style, there is a marked separation for the author between these artists he highlights for criticism, and the subjects of his study. These archival works do not claim to be complete or an authority, but rather, in the opinion of Foster, are “concerned less with absolute origins than with obscure traces... these artists are often drawn to unfulfilled beginnings or incomplete projects”.<sup>93</sup> In this manner, Foster reflects upon the nature of the archive itself. Through the work of writers such as Warburg and Benjamin there has been set a precedent for work which takes on these archival qualities and methodologies as being ultimately ‘unfinished’. It is a form which is open to bodies of work which shift and undergo multiple variants, transformations and stages. It is little surprise then, that the artists Foster identifies mirror this in both the content and form of their practices, although his own particular point of reference is the ‘rhizomatic’ organic collection of Deleuze.<sup>94</sup>

Foster points to this new wave of artists as being distinct from previous movements which used the form of the archive in the production of work “that underscores the nature of all archival materials as found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private.”<sup>95</sup> Earlier generations of artists had been recognising these qualities previously, for example Rodchenko's work on Lenin's legacy entered into that dialogue around the public/private dichotomy. Yet, it could also be argued that those artists he highlights are in dialogue with these tensions, particularly in relation to the public/private dichotomy evidenced in the approach of Dean particularly in bringing personal narratives into an archival, documented format.

In focusing on Tacita Dean's work, Foster romantically describes her practice as “recovering lost souls”<sup>96</sup> and that her practice is often drawn to those,

---

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 11.

“...people, things, and places that are stranded, outmoded or otherwise sidelined, Dean discusses one such case [*Girl Stowaway*] as it ramifies into an archive of its own aleatory accord.”<sup>97</sup>

In this description Foster implies that it is the narrative and process of investigation itself that creates the archival body of work, as opposed to the direct intention of the artist, as though Dean is somehow dragged along naively in her narratives. In this it is difficult to ascertain one way or the other how far Dean’s practice is calculated toward an end result, however she is likely more certain of her process and how it functions within these contexts than Foster here credits her for. Dean, in her practice has developed a formula and structure around which she can build her process into an archive, a record which then becomes the work.

This attraction to the doomed grand project reflects the nature of the archive or collection as never satisfactorily ‘complete’. Dean points to her subject’s obsessional behaviour whilst also accepting her own identification with the need to reach for an unattainable state of having completed her work and their narrative. In recognising the past as inherently incomplete, Dean looks to the idealised future where the present might be properly and fully represented. The imagined ideal archive and its tension with a muddled and indecipherable past is played out within these works.

Considering Dean’s practice as centred around “failed futuristic visions” which she “recovers archivally”.<sup>98</sup> Foster also highlights the significance of the utopian within Dean’s practice: that the ‘risk’ in her work and the ultimate failure of the subject matter is an idealised attempt to carry through utopian visions. In this, according to Foster, Dean sets out a presentation of past narratives (and by wider inference historic archives) as, “a concomitant of her archival presentation of the past as fundamentally heterogeneous and always incomplete.”<sup>99</sup> This identification of Dean’s work and preoccupations as a

---

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.



practitioner connects her back to the work of Benjamin and Warburg as forerunners of this trend within artistic practice, although Foster distances Dean's work from Benjamin's.

Foster singles out the *Teignmouth Electron* series of work for further discussion of Dean's practice, a body of work consisting of multiple films and a publication spanning the period 1996 – 2000. These works follow the narrative of Donald Crowhurst, an amateur sailor whose attempt to compete in the 1968 Golden Globe Race ended in his disappearance (presumed lost at sea). Dean charts the notion of sea and time-madness in the first two films, and documents the remains of the boat itself found on the island of Cayman Brac in the final film. Continuing in his assertion that Dean's process is ultimately an unpredictable journey, reflected in the work itself, Foster describes the *Teignmouth Electron* series as, "another lost-and-found story, and it too involves 'uncharted research' for protagonist and archivist alike."<sup>100</sup> Significantly, Foster refers to Dean here as 'archivist', as opposed to an artist.

The films which are referred to in Foster's essay act as this 'archive'; however they very much function and were shown, as standalone pieces of work charting the narrative. The 'text' which Foster briefly references (*Teignmouth Electron*, 1999), might more accurately be considered as archive. Within the text Dean charts her own research process and journey as parallel narrative with Crowhurst's, seeking to understand a series of past actions which have an uncanny and literal impact on her present. The work represents Dean turning her process into archive and new practice in itself. However, Foster reads this as a naïve course, recounted exactly in the films instead of considering Dean's own skill and dexterity as storyteller crafting the narrative of her practice within the archival format.

---

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 13.

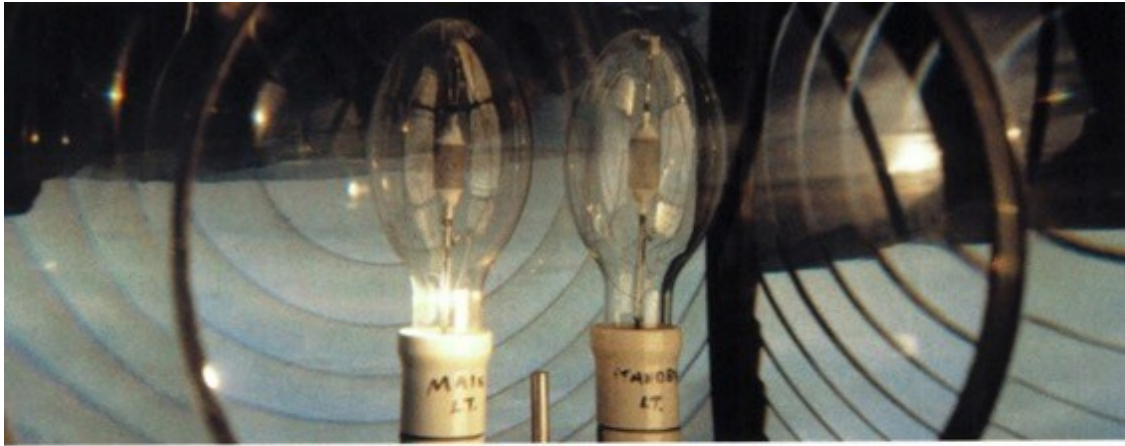


Figure 7: Tacita Dean, *Disappearance at Sea* (1996)



Figure 8: Tacita Dean, *Teignmouth Electron* (1999)

In describing Dean's practice Foster widely ignores the interplay between her films and texts in their significance to the archive. These films take on the physical resonance of the form in their outmoded yet assertive presence in the gallery space; a whirr of the 16mm stock and its visceral qualities. The subject's narratives are charted through repetitive and cyclical imagery (a state that might be equated to Derrida's archive fever). However, it is with the publications and texts that accompany these works that their archival potential is fully played out. Dean as author (and character) tends toward a state of acting as historian and archivist, chasing the narrative down through her practice, consisting of the text, scraps of paper, photos and found objects. Frequent uncanny and unlikely connections are struck up between the artist – as – archivist, the characters she seeks, and encounters with sites – combining within a dense set of intertwined histories and fictions. Foster, in his overview of Dean's practice fails to recognise these texts as where the essentially archival qualities of her practice lie, and more than simply charting her research Dean has within them found a method of working archivally to produce independent works charting a fictionalised account of her practice.

Archival artists, as described by Foster, are invariably concerned with these patchy and obscure histories ("recalcitrantly material, fragmentary rather than fungible"<sup>101</sup>), rather than the carefully ordered and catalogued administrative, institutional, archive. These artists work with archives that require their presence and intervention in order to be decoded and disseminated. It appears that this manner of practitioner is attracted to the traces left (as Ricoeur described those elements saved 'without an eye to their future value') rather than to archives of bureaucracy. Potentially identifying with the records aligned with their own experience of retaining and reordering elements of unfinished and incomplete bodies of work. Foster describes Dean's practice as being, "an allegory of archival work – sometimes melancholic, often vertiginous always incomplete."<sup>102</sup>

Since Foster's essay and his identification of the 'archival trend' within contemporary

---

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 12.

practice, a number of other commentators have sought to further identify the evolving state of the archive in contemporary practice, and the implications for artists using it as their subject or method. In tracking the shifts in this commentary since the 2004 publication of Foster's work, two essays are compared; Julie Bacon's *Archive, Archive, Archive!* published in 2007, and Neal White's *Experiments and Archives in the Expanded Field* from 2013. Following the changing attitudes to archival works in this way allows us to follow the stages of adaptation and the developing uptake of the archive as a familiar presence within the contemporary field. With White's article the implications are also made clear; that a new method for working with archives is quite apart from the one that Foster described.

Julie Bacon's particular specialism is the archive and its links to site, her PhD and later research investigating how performance, archives and location work with and against each other. Her essay *Archive, Archive, Archive!* is singled out for discussion here in its timeliness in demonstrating how perception of archival work had shifted since Foster's work, and in its unique perspective of thinking about the specific language used to describe archival practices. The paper has not been widely referenced, yet Bacon's approach allows us to further consider the precise nature of these archival practices.

Bacon begins with both a reference to the archive's nature as a prolific point of discussion, enveloped within a denial: "I will dispel any sense that there is a fatigue on my part."<sup>103</sup> This opening implies that since Foster's recognition of the zeitgeist in 2003, the subject of the archive in contemporary practice has become ubiquitous. Bacon turns to language in order to describe the upswing of interest in the archival form, "The choice of referring to the archiving 'theme', 'interest', or 'issue' in a work itself inflects value into our observation of the artist's understanding."<sup>104</sup> The line of questioning which Bacon employs reflects this increased adoption of the form, considering how critical texts approach the archive and reflect the ranges of bias toward the form, and in turn the ways in which the language used allows us to understand more of the nature of that

---

<sup>103</sup> J. Bacon, "ARCHIVE, ARCHIVE, ARCHIVE," *Circa : Contemporary Art Journal.*, no. 119 (2007): 51.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

work and its relationship to the archive.

Thinking through the implications of using a variety of terms (issue, fashion, tendency etc). Bacon identifies the need to be specific and direct in the terminology used, rather than to colour or impact upon works whose significance cannot yet be read. Here, there is an echo of Ricoeur's refrain that the traces of the greatest value are those which were not recognised or retained as such.

Bacon cites the Society of Archivists manual as stating that "archivists no longer have the monopoly on the terms used to describe their activities."<sup>105</sup> As the variety of language describing the archival approach has expanded the adoption of the specialist terminology of the archival profession has been appropriated and loosely applied to a wide range of actions and outputs. Equally, the popularity of the form has given rise to new terms, such as artists and curators applying 'archive' as a verb, a definite and purposeful action to create new documentation which the trained archivist would neither apply or carry out within their work. Bacon points toward the understanding of the archive through the employment of its name as term: once a specific and bureaucratic form, it has in the past decade come to be used in a variety of contexts, i.e. the selection and curation of online content.

Bacon calls for those describing archival artistic practices to be mindful of the terminology employed, and how that might shift over time, reframing each additional layer of practice and text.

"Protecting, authenticating, democratising, debunking, *collapsing and colliding*: through archives – writing on them and art projects in them – we see the tides of our times, reactionary, neo-liberal, postmodern, deconstructivist and *other*."<sup>106</sup>

---

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

Describing archival work, according to Bacon, demonstrates some of the prejudice toward interdisciplinary art practices in a more general sense, reflecting a suspicion that appropriation of the archival form has been increased in a push toward practices which are more likely to attract funding with false promises of inclusion and approachability. This potentially neoliberal approach, although perhaps true for some, is seen by Bacon as undermining and ignoring “the contribution that artists make as instigators of collaboration.”<sup>107</sup> In singling out one from the other, Bacon points out the need to question how far the work relates to archives (in content or form) when the artist claims that link. As she calls for a need of clarity and specific language used around this type of practice, Bacon also wishes to apply that same level of scrutiny to the work itself.

“When we see the full ambition of artists’ interest in archive, we see that actions in archives, shifts in order, are *inscriptions*. These affect the naming process – which is part of the power of the archive, its ritual power of enactment – and so something is *instituted*, is put in motion from within.”<sup>108</sup>

Turning to Derrida’s understanding of the archive as the physical public/private space to be inscribed upon, Bacon links both the practice of artists and how it is named described. The archive in turn influences the reception and understanding of the work as institutional, now shifted through that connection, each effecting the other. Further, Bacon acknowledges the part of critics and academics, implicated within this process of power based evolving connections. Those discussing the archival works in contemporary practice are themselves adding to the archive, creating histories and simultaneously defining the conventions and scope which the practice is framed within. Going on to state, “I believe we would do well to be specific – critical and creative – in our contributions as artists and writers.”<sup>109</sup>

---

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 57.

“An awareness of the relationship between practice and ideology is key. The choice of *what* we do and *how* transmits attitude, as much as content and the motives that we *are* owning up to or claiming. The aesthetics of our work forms subjecthood.”<sup>110</sup>

In concluding her argument, Bacon, writing as both academic and practitioner, calls for a carefully considered approach to the archive, and situating oneself within it (either as artist or critic). The writer must select appropriate terminology when describing such work and thereby citing it within a larger archive of cultural activity. Equally, the artist must consider the process and methodology of the archival, rather than the surface appropriation of its aesthetics, or claims toward subject matter where none exists.

Neal White in *Experiments and Archives in the Expanded Field*, considers Foster’s assessment of archives and contemporary practice a decade after it was first published, going on to provide an overview of current research and emergent methods in relation to art located within the archival field. White differentiates between two types of artist working with archives; those who independently create their own body of documents and artefacts, and those who work with existing institutions intervening within their archives and collections. (White gives the examples of Walid Raad and Susan Hiller representing each group respectively). Although not dismissive of either type of practitioners, White does observe that, “perhaps we are reaching critical mass in what Hal Foster calls ‘the archival impulse’, in which artists construct new realities for archives...”<sup>111</sup>

Recalling Foster’s utopian vision of the archive, White points to an emergent archival culture where practitioners and collectives working beyond the institution, creating their own organisations, independent from the validation provided by government organisations, galleries or museums. Going on to observe, “the way in which artistic

---

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Neal White, “Experiments and Archives in the Expanded Field,” in *All This Stuff: Archiving the Artist*, ed. Judy Vaknin, Victoria Lane, and Karyn Stuckey (Oxfordshire: Libri Publishing, 2013), 47.

practice as research is currently engaging with the archive evokes other, deeper forms of knowledge production by the artist.”<sup>112</sup>

White refers also to the manner in which this knowledge is being produced, with artists collaborating and forming collectives, initiating new models for research, and specifically, practice led research. Rather than approaching tasks as individual practitioners, the trend has moved toward a form which values collaboration and shared knowledge.

“These activities deliberately circumnavigate established territories occupied by the major institutional players such as large-scale museums, universities and their respective collections whose conception of the archive is as a source and font of wisdom.”<sup>113</sup>

White points to the upsurge in technology as being part of the cause for this shift – technology pieces to be spread to a wider audience, in terms of making, but also, critically, in founding independent institutions for research purposes. He describes the process of collaboration in his own experience, participating in a collective including artists, researchers and geographers. The Centre for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI) founded in 1994, and holds a number of photographic documents of the American landscape also catalogued as an archive. This body of work exists as both an online database, and disseminated at a wide range of venues through exhibitions (not just within the institutional gallery or museum space). White characterises the group’s unique approach as an ‘expanded field’, an approach which “moves beyond standard interpretations or research methods” and in so doing “CLUI has identified its own role as adding different and multiple voices to this public resource.”<sup>114</sup>

Pointing to later key projects which further explored and experimented with the form of

---

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 48.



the archive, White references both Simon Gould and Antony Hudek's work, both of whom investigated the process *and* nature of the form as opposed to only replicating archival aesthetics. Hudek in particular is credited as recognising the archive as a site of discourse, he and Gould (alongside Latham), "demonstrate how artists and independent researchers expand the field and forms of archival practice."<sup>115</sup> They also recognise the intrinsic value that lies in removing that process from the institutional, museum environment.

White goes on to suggest that these new formulations of the archive are interlinked with the experimental process that created them, and this in turn questions the existing relationships and balance of power within the archive. He states,

"The governing logic of these entities in form and structure is topologically different in that they not only occupy new space but question the logic of these spaces; and in their consequent temporalities or sense of permanence, which lie at the heart of any historical associations, they are transformative across planes of engagement."<sup>116</sup>

Rather than accepting the site and institutional conventions of the usual archival structure, these contemporary practitioners and collectives question the very nature of their structure and how they might go about creating knowledge.

White goes on to state that to only base knowledge upon the institutional archive discounts the research and work of many artists who explore the form outside of this context. Rather than working in opposition to the institutional, these artists work collaboratively, sharing findings and creating loose collectives. Rather than limiting their scope via the archival situation, these groups consider the medium as a space to create new knowledge, rather than only decode, or align with, existing research.

---

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

White connects the process and technique of an ‘experimental’ method, with the archive and its holdings. He identifies this experimental approach as particularly suited to the archival, with its collection of epistemic holdings and reliance on the storage, ordering and preservation of these items. From the artistic perspective, “epistemic things are critical as they transgress any simple material/immaterial division of knowledge. They are bound to but are not dependant on these materials.”<sup>117</sup>

White, within the same paper, cites the John Latham archive as one which is experimental, playing with its location, within and beyond the institution. (The main body of documents are physically held by Tate, but experimental elements existing online, within Flat Time House, and in exhibition formats.) Managing to balance both an ‘official’ status, alongside a counter institutional stance and methods, allows the Latham archive to exist in a number of situations, and in this way holds great value to understanding how an artist’s archive might lead a continued existence within multiple contexts.

The site of the house itself was explored as a space for both experimental methodologies to be employed in producing artwork and research, and existed as a place to test ideas around event structures. White refers to Flat Time House as a “physical site and theoretical model”,<sup>118</sup> whilst also existing as an archive of those experiments, both then and now. Following Latham’s death White credits Hudek as recognising and developing the basis for new approaches to archiving, leading to the online work of Velios, and the continued use of the house as a site for practice and research. White also points to Latham himself having been aware of this potential,

“It is clear that Latham understood intuitively the legacy of the physical site of the house, as an artwork, and how his own work could be contained within it even beyond his own lifetime; immobile but temporal.”<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 50.

Following the death of Latham the archive relating to his collaborative work with the artist collective the Artist Placement Group (APG) was overseen by the artist Barbara Steveni who founded the group, although much of the archive resided at Flat Time House and various other domestic locations. The negotiation between Steveni, the other artists and Tate (who eventually bought the archive) represents a very different approach to the records when contrasted with those of Latham as an individual artist. Instead, the acquisition was commercial but carried out with the consent of all participating group members.

Steveni stated that she “was determined that it had to be bought”.<sup>120</sup> The monetary value Steveni places on the APG archive reflects a different attitude in how she values the collected documents, using the content as a ‘tool’ or work in itself. As part of the acquisition Steveni negotiated that Tate would stage live events with the APG, and since this time Steveni has continued to work on ideas surrounding the archive, beginning to inhabit the role herself with the performance work *I AM AN ARCHIVE* (an ongoing project from 2005 onwards), realising “I was a kind of database of memories and knowledge about the documents I was reading and looking at.”<sup>121</sup>

The status of the APG archive was shifted by Steveni in her writing into the acquisition papers the proviso that “if anybody loaned or published from it they had to acknowledge that APG was a collective and it belonged to the artists and that it was an artwork.”<sup>122</sup> This very deliberate naming of the archive as an artwork, yet placing it within the institutional archival environment demonstrates some of the complexities around the Latham and APG bodies of work and their legacy.

---

<sup>120</sup> Lane, Victoria, “An Interview With Barbara Steveni,” in *All This Stuff: Archiving the Artist*, ed. Vaknin, Judy and Stuckey, Karyn (Oxfordshire: Libri Publishing, 2013), 65.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 65.



Figure 9: *The Individual and the Organisation: Artist Placement Group 1966-79*, exhibition view at Raven Row, London (2012)



Figure 10: *The Individual and the Organisation: Artist Placement Group 1966-79*, exhibition view at Raven Row, London (2012)

Elements of the APG archive have been exhibited in 2012 at Raven Row Gallery, London, as *The Individual and the Organisation: Artist Placement Group 1966-79*. (Alex Sainsbury, owner of the gallery funded the cataloguing of the APG archive at Tate, hence the exhibition in return). The gallery exhibition selected and isolated key elements of the archive, screening Steveni's own narrative as a film piece, and included multiple live events and discussions as part of the project. The exhibition of these archival holdings clearly reframes them as work in their own right, extending the impact of those original actions and strategies employed by the APG. This is in contrast to the exhibition of archival documents by other galleries (such as Tate), where the documents tend to be clearly marked as 'other' – laid flat in vitrines rather than on the wall, in spaces to one side of the artworks.

The multiple ways in which the Latham and APG archives continue to exist and be accessed by artists and researchers represent the wide variety of potential ways an artistic archive might remain. Each variance also gives us an impression of the implied value which is attached to the body of documents by those who own, or oversee them, and the ways in which this might translate meaning to the viewer or researcher.

#### **1.4 Triangulating the Archive**

The artist's archive offers a balance between the valued products of an individual's practice, how they might act as a frame for that practice, and the later institutionalised homogenised series of documents. It presents a dynamic flow and makes evident the process of evolution for the materials – reflecting the emergence and adoption of the archival as a form and context for practice.

This triangulation of approaches within the study; the academic, the institutional and the artistic, seeks to demonstrate the multi-faceted form of the archive. Each stance is important to my research – seeking to work within a context informed by all three in considering where knowledge might be created, and observing how a practice situated

as such might discover new meanings for the form. It is also significant to the archive in a wider context, the approach offering a balanced view between the various factors which influence the formation, use and keeping of artistic archives.

## 2.0 The Performance Archive

The previous chapter established a field for this study in demonstrating the archive from three critical perspectives; that of the academic, archivist and artist. These three positions have provided a framework for my own research, allowing me to work between and within the three disciplines to create work which acknowledges these multiple aspects of the archival form.

The research carried out increasingly led to the areas where archival practices and theory found the most difficulties and were challenged by the artistic work that sought to be contained. This led particularly to the notion of performance, and how performative practices might be represented within the archival form. Latham created multiple works which explored this very problem and was reflected in the creation of his archive interface by Velios, each fresh interaction following a unique pattern. Calle's practice also suggested that the viewer was viewing the remains – the moment described had already passed.

Further than the artists already discussed, Ricoeur's theory of the trace particularly connects to the notion of performative practice: it requires only the faintest trace to remain, with no explanation necessarily available. In the case of physical works the archive of the artist's process can always be read in the light of the work itself – in the case of performance works the archive becomes essential for understanding that passed gesture.

This chapter focuses specifically on the archive left by temporal, performance practices. This is an example of artistic practice considered to be particularly problematic as regards to how it might remain following the work's duration, and how such practices might exist within the archive (or collections and art history narratives). The existing research considering performance work might also be applied to other forms of contemporary practice when considering how process, as a live action, might be recorded within the work or archive. My own practice led research in this area is

included within the following chapter, considering how actions and performance (often without witness) might exist beyond their temporality, in documents or other forms. In particular, the physical remains of past performances are explored in order to further understand how these troublesome artefacts might situate the original work within the archive, functioning as trace, or go on to be established as independent works.

Performance practices have a complex relationship to their documentation and existence within archives. This wasn't always as evident as it is now, with the debate around this issue only becoming popularised by American academics in the 1990s with the publication of texts by authors such as Peggy Phelan. In a backlash of sorts academics made clear that the increase in prevalence of video recordings were not the performance and needed to be clearly defined as such. This reading was followed by a number of complex readings of how performance might exist or disappear within an ever increasing range of media types and archive structures.

This debate took place with the backdrop of early performance practices and experimental theatre beginning to slip out of living memory. Artists such as Cindy Oswin undertook research projects to save these memories through archival techniques (interview, collecting images, and more unusually, re-performance), whilst a new generation of academics and artists actively denied the value of marking presence in this way.

This chapter begins with the key elements of the debate in existing literature around performance explored, through which I provide a re-appraisal of Peggy Phelan's work. Often described as opposed to any sort of documentation, her work in fact offers a more nuanced argument questioning how performative works might exist as object based interpretations within the gallery or museum context. Moving on to more recent academic work around the performance archive I introduce Rebecca Schneider's statement that the live itself could be viewed as a recording, and her assessment of the myth of disappearance as having been introduced by historians and collectors who wish to narrate an object based narrative of art history.



Following on from this I have established a working taxonomy of the elements which make up the performance archive, both in terms of the physical objects, and the more abstract elements. This review of the archival form was important in conducting research into existing institutional performance archives, allowing me to identify some of the similarities and differences between these archives. In conducting this research, the three archives of performative work were found to be markedly different in both content, context and the policy toward acquisition. In particular, the example of the Fluxus archive at Tate offered an alternative example to the style of archive more commonly discussed in the debate around performance practices.

The complex nature of performance documentation and its surrounding debate offers a model for testing how the artistic archive and trace function: a space to question the nature of documents and the narrative of a past produced by them. Within this context the focus of my study shifts from the more straightforward question of how accurately the archive records the live, to if the archive might be viewed as potentially work in and of itself, the performance is recast as a stage of that production, part of a process. These questions are explored through my practice led research which concludes the chapter.

## **2.1 Existing Literatures**

The following section uses three key texts to explore existing work around the performance archive from academic research into the remains and documentation of live art practices. The selected writers (Phelan, Schneider and Taylor) have been selected as authors which lay the foundations in and beyond feminist, postmodern and post-structuralist interpretations of what the performance archive might represent. Each allows for a further re-envisioning of the structure of what these remains might take, and their relationship to the original work.

## 2.1.1 Phelan and the Art Document

"Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance."<sup>123</sup>

Beyond this frequently cited passage Peggy Phelan provides in *Unmarked: the Politics of Performance*, a nuanced and intricate argument around performance documentation and its bleed into the visual (object based) art. Originally published in 1993, this text was one of the first influential academic works to question the process of documenting live work. However, much in the same way as performance documentation is liable to do, the quoted statement is often taken out of context, and has come to represent (unfaithfully) Phelan's work as a post-positivist rejection of all performance's archival. In fact, the statement acts as a frame for Phelan's ensuing text which specifically explores feminist readings of disappearance in performance and visual arts practice (frequently pieces which span these disciplinary boundaries to some extent). There is no setting out of arguments 'for' or 'against' performance archives as is often described: Phelan acknowledges the documentation of work as a fact, she only states it needs to be recognised as different from the live, just as a first performance would be different from later iterations.<sup>124</sup> Much as Diana Taylor later recognised writing's significance to early American cultures, Phelan cites the documentation of performance as a "spur to memory, an encouragement of memory to become present."<sup>125</sup>

In the introductory pages of her text, Phelan describes the work as being both "an

---

<sup>123</sup> Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (Routledge, 1993), 146.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

attempt to find a theory of value for that which is not 'really' there, that which cannot be surveyed within the boundaries of the putative real", and, as "attempting to revalue a belief in subjectivity and identity which is not visibly representable."<sup>126</sup> Here, Phelan has set out her objectives in the work as being to provide a frame for interrogating the absent performative moment, and by applying psychoanalytic and feminist theory to the representations of work, to test and define the limits of the image or object. Although *Unmarked* recognises a difference between the performance work and its physical record, Phelan does not dismiss one or the other; rather focusing on the space between and those artists who push notions of presence and representation to their limits.

*Unmarked* is a complex and layered series of texts which Phelan later works through, and contains none of the polarised opinions which later interpretations of her writing have imposed upon it. The 'unmarked' is recognised as concentrating around "the broken symmetry between the self and the other" which allows for the "acknowledgement of a failed inward gaze."<sup>127</sup> In this the visual and its representations are noted as insufficient, yet also surplus, always representing more than is intended. In accepting the visual reminder as at once failing and in excess of accurately relaying any moment experienced, Phelan goes on to describe the unmarked in terms of what is not, where it might not exist.

The unmarked crosses that space and dichotomy between the absent/present and in doing so is as elusive as the death drive described by Derrida and Freud. In the obscure traces of the death drive, we are only able to glimpse what it is that might have been destroyed – and then only briefly through what Derrida describes as the beauty associated with death – usually even these are prone to destruction. This echoes in Phelan's description of the unmarked, functioning through the observation and interaction of the viewer; "In writing the unmarked I mark it, inevitably. In seeing it I am marked by it."<sup>128</sup> And, like that notion of the death drive, its traces and our barely

---

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

tangible understanding of them, does little but allude to a larger whole: "But because what I do not see and do not write is so much more vast than what I do it is impossible to 'ruin' the unmarked."<sup>129</sup>

Crucially for Phelan, "in the analysis of the means of production, the unmarked signals the un(re)productive."<sup>130</sup> Here, the definition of the unmarked is made clearer - it represents that which cannot bear repetition, its nature is in the singular moment, and any memory or record betrays that moment as something tangible or easily replicated. However, any such viewing or attempt to recall, also opens a dialogue between this present and absent action, the seen and unseen. As is alluded to this challenge and the duality of the situation in relation to performance particularly offers "generative possibilities"<sup>131</sup> in the disappearance of the work. However, Phelan also clearly states that her study, and the accompanying notion of the unmarked transcends the disciplinarily and includes performative work in photography, painting, protest etc. These politics of representation and reproduction span further than performance or live art alone. Representation of the self and other is an element of the study which has wider reaching implications, particularly for writers after Phelan such as Schneider and Taylor in their own works on the performance archive.

In moving to a discussion of Cindy Sherman's practice Phelan more clearly marks her position regarding the self and other, and also demonstrates the interdisciplinary scope of her work. Sherman's practice is situated in the field of the performative by Phelan, yet as viewers we are only able to view its photographic (object based) representations. Yet, in this feminist reading of the work, on viewing these images we do not view Sherman herself, but the displaced representation of the other. The image, more specifically our reading of the image, is driven by the female self, representing no-one in particular, a cipher for taught notions of femininity. Early works by Sherman such as the *Bus Riders* (1976) series and *Untitled Film Stills #1-69* (1977-80) continue a

---

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

(re)performance of these taught others, a constant shifting which offers no fixed version of the self or the real. As Phelan describes,

"The real which photography reproduces seems in Sherman's work curiously evacuated. Adding to the anonymity and ubiquitousness of her images, Sherman left them all 'untitled'." <sup>132</sup>

Sherman's practice re-performs these familiar roles and scenarios back to us, in a series of representations which perform the other: what stands in for the feminine. This sameness and surface exists within the image, which we understand as performed by the artist. Although each scenario differs, the image and accompanying narrative of the other is clearly read as a type which is swiftly reducible.

"Sherman's performances - the assembly of clothes, the constructed set, the lighting, the precise gesture - compress and express the life story of someone we recognize, or think we recognize, in a single image." <sup>133</sup>

Phelan goes on to recount how the sameness of these images went beyond what Sherman intended to provoke, and were instead read as sexualised narratives. This even further reductive reading of the image types represented led Sherman to further disguise and disfigure herself as performer within the portraits, in an attempt to locate some further removed other. Despite these attempts Sherman's work continued to be read as these feminine types, now recast in a darker and violent situation.

"The imitative pose, Sherman found, was almost too easy to frame with her camera. Her work suggests that the camera itself *demand*s the imitative pose because it can only read, speak and reflect the surface." <sup>134</sup>

---

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 64.



Figure 11: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #35* (1979)

As Warburg had previously found, there is an aesthetic language at work within the artistic archive which represents continued trauma, and also in this case, something approximate to the male gaze. Here, Phelan describes Sherman's process in a way that might also be considered as mirroring the hypothesis of the *Mnemosyne Atlas*: the collecting and re-presenting of found images of the female form by Sherman represents a continued legacy in the production of traumatic memory through aesthetics. What Phelan describes as the male gaze, could instead be considered as something for more ancient described by Warburg as the inherited memory of trauma. Within this context, Sherman could not avoid the constant retelling and repetition in the documents of her performative practice. Without context the photographs are open to multiple readings. Phelan points to the unconscious image behind the one we view, a negative which joins with the visible, creating one whole: "That one is the impression left on the photographic surface; the one left unmarked/undeveloped is the negative image."<sup>135</sup>

Phelan refers to Sherman's practice as entirely a performative one, where we as the viewer view the remains as photographic object. In grounding this argument she states, "...Cindy Sherman is also uneasy about the limitations of photography. In fact, she dislikes the label photographer, preferring to call her work performance art."<sup>136</sup> This is in the context of an essay that also presents the work of Mapplethorpe as performance, or at least, performative, and introduces its themes with the statement "All portrait photography is fundamentally performative."<sup>137</sup> Although many would argue Sherman's practice is firmly situated within a tradition of photographic work, Phelan's reading is less that Sherman in particular should be recognised as a performer instead, but rather the performative process to the genre should be recognised by the performance studies canon and included in analysis of the form, especially in relation to remains and the archival.

---

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 35.



Figure 12: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #93* (1981)

Returning to the familiar quoted passage which began this thesis section, Phelan defines performance as "becom[ing] itself through disappearance"<sup>138</sup>, yet, despite this seemingly polarised stance of performance only existing in the present moment, Phelan recalls work by Sophie Calle - a visual artist who might be said to exhibit the archived remains of a performative process. Phelan recalls two examples of Calle's work *Last Seen* (1991), and *Ghosts* (1991), both of which asked museum staff and visitors to recall and replace absent paintings with written descriptions of them. The idea of permanence and the visibility of the familiar art object is challenged here, as is the ability to remember and recall experience clearly. Phelan describes this process as, "a kind of self-concealment in which she [Calle] offers the words of others about other works of art under her own artistic signature."<sup>139</sup> In this way Calle appropriates the records and memories of others. She curates and collects these documents as her own practice, as the archivist or the rag picker poet of Benjamin might.

According to Phelan these two bodies of work by Calle, "demonstrate the performative

---

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 146.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 147.



quality of all seeing."<sup>140</sup> In her thesis Phelan uses these works as an allegorical reference point for all performance - it is unstable and constantly shifting, so neither should any one representation of it remain fixed or definitive. These records of performance are not denied, yet Phelan seems us to want to approach them with this knowledge of their traits. Yet, as a live action which can only be remembered (or forgotten), performance also evades control, it "disappears into memory, into the realm of invisibility and unconscious where it eludes regulation and control."<sup>141</sup> In this way, it is allowed to go unmarked, without monetary value, the context of the archive affecting its reading. Without the document the memory of performance might become something other - beyond, or counter, archival.

In writing *Unmarked* Phelan laid a groundwork for others to build upon. In the application of feminist theory, and the identification of the performance/absence dialogue, Rebecca Schneider expanded on later with her reading of the absent being and flesh as female. In opening up the potential of counter-archival modes of recollection as the unmarked, Diana Taylor further built upon and defined in her work around repertoire.

### 2.1.2 Schneider - Reframing the Performance archive

Marking a second wave of commentary around the performance archive, Rebecca Schneider's essay *Performance Remains*<sup>142</sup> offered a reading of the issues which questioned some of the central assumptions made around how the live might exist beyond and before its performance. The essay considers how performance functions within an archival environment, and against a notion that performance 'vanishes' without trace, arguing against Phelan and the academic consensus of the time. In 2011 the essay was republished as *In the Meantime: Performance Remains*<sup>143</sup>. Schneider uses

---

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 148.

<sup>142</sup> Rebecca Schneider, "Performance Remains," *Performance Research* 6, no. 2 (2001): 100–108.

<sup>143</sup> Rebecca Schneider, "In the Meantime: Performance Remains," in *Performing Remains: Art and War in*

this opportunity to “re-perform” the work, and uses the form of the essay fragmented across a decade of further research to consider the shifting state of performance and the archive. This later publication came within the context of a publication by Schneider entirely focused around the remains of performance, and demonstrates the broadening of theory around this issue, an increased interest in the live and its relationship to the archive.<sup>144</sup>

This reworked paper maps an academic enquiry around the performance document, then turning towards the archival structure itself. Rather than reflecting on the specific documentation left by contemporary practitioners, Schneider turns to the remains of the performer themselves, in flesh and in time. Opening the text, Schneider lists three suppositions she seeks to reconsider: that text remains where performance disappears, that the live cannot record, and that the present which live work exists within is fixed and singular. Considering the essay through these three filters, Schneider makes it her aim to counter much of the prevailing arguments around performance archives. However, this is not done in order to reflect on the physical, document based archive which might exist through performance, but instead to recognise the effects of the medium itself, its echoes and remains as an integral element of these performance practices.

Considering the widely quoted definition of performance as ephemeral, Schneider points towards the New York University output during the 1980s and 1990s as particularly framing this vision, alongside the expansion of studying performance in multi-disciplinary departments, away from the previous focus on the text within drama departments. She describes the “debate about whether and how performance disappears and/or remains” as “one of the most fecund questions to result”<sup>145</sup> from this newly formed performance studies genre. Whilst noting that this trend of ephemerality has arisen partly from the coincidental translation from French to English of Post-structuralist texts that offered further basis for this vein of research around theories of

---

*Times of Theatrical Re-enactment* (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2011), 87–110.

<sup>144</sup> All following references to the essay in this thesis are based on the later 2011 publication.

<sup>145</sup> Rebecca Schneider, “In the Meantime: Performance Remains,” 96.

'vanishment'.

Looking to the work of Phelan and Auslander, Schneider notes that both hold the position that "the live does not record"<sup>146</sup>. However, this varies in the specifics of each argument. Auslander approaches the subject from a post-Baudrillardian perspective, believing that the live is anything which might be recorded, whereas Phelan in contrast states the live cannot be recorded (and remain 'live'). In working to contradict both these statements, Schneider looks to theatre and Hamlet (which reoccurs throughout this essay), as an example of how the live always exists in a state of multiplicity, rather than a simple linear visioning of time passing.

"If liveness must imply an immediacy, or a 'real time' devoid of other times, as many might have it, then the delay, lag, doubling, duration, return, the betweenness of Hamlet's meantime could suggest that theatre can never be live. Or never *only* live."<sup>147</sup>

Considering the traces of performances, Schneider points to the nature of performance being described as that which disappears (and therefore unable to be preserved), as a viewpoint which aligns only with the Western system of the archive and as such exclude other strategies for remaining or remembering these actions. What is to us now, in the West, a familiar mode of remembering via archivable traces is not the only method for memorialising actions, and in elevating these symbols of moments passed they are marked as absent. As Schneider writes, "We understand ourselves relative to the remains we accumulate as indices of vanishment..."<sup>148</sup>

In her argument against the myth of disappearance Schneider raises the issue of art history - a point that has been expanded on before and since (it is also an aspect of Phelan's *Unmarked*). Historians and collectors of art place value in objects, so an art

---

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 92.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

form that has no physical or commercial presence which endured, has, to this system of values 'vanished'. Schneider et al argue that this stance is reductive, and based on financial concerns, the work does endure but in ways which counter the system of art ownership and established narratives of art history. Schneider also notes that "it is precisely in live art and live theatre that scores of late 20th and early 21st century artists explore history - the recomposition of remains *in and as the live*."<sup>149</sup>

"The archive became a mode of governance *against* memory."<sup>150</sup>

Here, Schneider moves toward Derrida's description of the archive where to archive is a motion against memory whilst contradictorily attempting to negate forgetting. It requires performance to disappear in its alternative forms, and instead exist only in that archival structure.

That performance is not allowed to act as its own document by these prevailing narratives of how work remains, opens up the question of how exactly performance can exist in a state counter to the usual archival document based methods. It is an issue which is considered not only by Schneider, but a whole range of academics in 21<sup>st</sup> Century performance studies.

### **2.1.3 Taylor - Repertoire / Archive**

Diana Taylor in her 2003 text, *The Archive and the Repertoire* furthered the work of Schneider and others in recognising the potential of counter-archival forms acting both within and against the performance archive. This work was a crucial development in offering a dialogue for remains of work beyond (in excess) of the physical, institutional archive. Taylor's argument is focused on a legacy of work from a non-Western perspective which was carried on through culturally inherited traditions of embodied

---

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 100.

transmission. This approach to the remembrance and continuation of gestural and performative traditions, also provides a strong model for thinking through live and temporal artworks in an alternative model of embodiment and existence beyond the archive.

The work opens with a grounding of performance practices as the embodied repertoire within early South American culture pre-conquest. This basis of work in the non-Western tradition of the archive as text is traced through imagery (rather in the manner of Warburg), and gesture through to contemporary practitioners working with these political and cultural legacies. The work goes on to consider memorialisation and trauma within popular culture through these same qualities of gesture and its transference, contrasted with work by contemporary South American performers such as the Peruvian collective Yuyachkani working with traumatic memory, and Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña's controversial and confrontational caged work *The Year of the White Bear*.

Taylor's text positions the archive as only one option for the remembrance of work and its dissemination; one which has proliferated as the approach popularised in modern, Western culture which privileges the written record and an order of bureaucratic governance. The central argument put forward by Taylor is to offer the notion of embodied knowledge and its transmission as an alternative. A viewpoint summarised as, "Embodied practice, along with and bound up with other cultural practices, offers a way of knowing."<sup>151</sup>

The debate around the disappearing nature of performance is framed by Taylor as political in the extreme, through the reasoning that if performative actions are by nature made absent, it is the inheritance and identity of those histories outside the Western structure of the archival that is lost. This stance which is Taylor's position throughout the text does not however, consider the performative traditions which are present and under threat within Western culture, in terms of live art and dance practices which also may be

---

<sup>151</sup> Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Cultural Memory and Performance in the Americas* (London: Duke University Press, 2003), 3.

best suited to embodied transmission as opposed to being positioned within the institutional archival space.

Moving from (what is described as) a specifically Western paradigm of historical narrative, to an engagement with alternative forms of knowledge and practice, is recognised by Taylor as a complex shift. Reframing what is accepted as historic inheritance and legacy poses a challenge, particularly allowing embodied knowledge the same privilege as written forms. Yet, according to Taylor, these performative means will continue to transmit knowledge post-writing, just as they did before it. The implications of this proposed methodological switch are noted, alongside the invitation to consider that:

"Instead of focusing on patterns of cultural expression in terms of texts and narratives, we might think about them as scenarios that do not reduce gesture and embodied practices to narrative description."<sup>152</sup>

Taylor recalls a time in Latin America (pre conquest), when although writing was recognised as significant and valued, it was mainly employed as a mnemonic aid to serve and preserve performance in the case of embodied transfer failing. Yet, following the European conquest writing was "legitimized" over this existing embodied system.<sup>153</sup> The value and expertise of the cultural knowledge and its practitioners was devalued, the rituals replaced. In considering this lost repertoire, Taylor gives the following description:

"[Repertoire] enacts the embodied memory: performance, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing - in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, non-reproducible knowledge."<sup>154</sup>

---

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 20.

It is noted that within the repertoire, the actions and particular choreography of a given piece may be altered, but the meaning, significance and context always remains. This is in direct opposition to the archive where the contents are kept in stasis, yet the relevance of the object to its society is lost. Each repeated variation presents the exchange of this alternative knowledge, and demonstrates how it shifts through generations of embodiment.

"Performances also replicate themselves through their own structure and codes. This means that the repertoire, like the archive, is mediated."<sup>155</sup>

The repertoire is a system that filters and selects, remembers and reforms: it is one of re-performance. With each repetition a layer of reinterpretation, present-ness is added to the performance's repertoire. In Taylor's view, this constant state of re-selection and re-performance is how the repertoire functions as communicator and record of cultural knowledge, which can transmit through generations.

Although much of her argument places the archive and repertoire in binary conflict, Taylor does admit that they "usually work in tandem...alongside other system of transmission [ie] the digital and the visual..." and so doing, both forms "exceed the limitations of the other."<sup>156</sup> Here, we encounter aspects of Taylor's argument integrating the two systems, with the claim that most cultures do require (and make use of) both the archive and repertoire, including within the Western European tradition. This countered by Taylor with the observation that the repertoire is usually consigned to (non-) history and is not recognised as a culturally relevant form - unlike the archive.

Taylor argues that performance and its study enables us to,

"...take seriously the repertoire of embodied practices as an important system of knowing and transmitting knowledge. The repertoire, as a very

---

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 20–21.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 21.

practical level, expands the traditional archive used by academic departments in the humanities."<sup>157</sup>

The scenario begins to emerge as an element of Taylor's argument which is pertinent to the consideration of the remains of performance practices - particularly when contextualised as re-performance. According to Taylor, the scenario consists of a "portable framework [which] bears the weight of accumulative repeats."<sup>158</sup> Whilst a framework and structure through which to understand, the scenario also "makes visible, yet again, what is already there: the ghosts, the images, the stereotypes."<sup>159</sup> Scenarios function as a "paradigm for understanding social structure and behaviours [that] might allow us to draw from the repertoire as well as the archive."<sup>160</sup> It differs from the archival in allowing the individual to enact change within the situation, despite being structured in a recognisable, or towards a recognisable outcome.

This confirms that the archive and repertoire are required by each other, symbiotically, rather than in conflict. Taylor states that,

"One [system] is not reducible to another... The challenge is not to 'translate' from an embodied expression into a linguistic one or vice versa but to recognise the strengths and limitations of each system."<sup>161</sup>

According to Taylor, it is an important distinction that the scenario functions via re-enactment as opposed to the mimetic copy - it does not refer back to an unattainable 'original' and is instead always rooted in the present moment. The scenario is also positioned by Taylor as an observable form of communication; "as an act of transfer, as a paradigm that is formulaic, portable, repeatable..."<sup>162</sup> However, the drawbacks of the

---

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 54.



form are also noted; that its ease of adaptability stems from a simplistic rendering of situation and content. Yet, because of this, the scenario allows for a greater level of participation. Taylor considers the scenario to have no original, "it is always in quotations, a copy of a lost copy..."<sup>163</sup>

## **2.2 Archive research**

Following on from the review of literature and current research projects around performance archives, three key examples were selected to use as case studies: the British Library archive of Experimental Theatre and Live Art, the Tate held David Mayor archive of British Fluxus practice (predominantly from the 1970s), and the online archive of the Siobhan Davies Dance company.

These three were chosen following a period of initial research scoping the range of British archival holdings through catalogues and the work of other researchers. The archives were selected to represent differing approaches in the materials held, how they are accessed, the way each institution characterises themselves and their approach to further acquisitions. This approach to the selection intended to gain as wide an understanding as possible of what a performance archive might be and how it functions in the UK currently.

All three are institutional and recognised archives, although in three quite different contexts. This was intended in the selection to observe the implications of the situation of the archive on how the contents were collected and read. Across these differing situations the approach of the organisation and individual archivists were observed: in how they were influenced by the context and values of the institution, and if this impacted on the types of record which were held. Another concern was in observing how the institution viewed its own archive, and if the manner in which it was described

---

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 55.

and made available to public viewing implied anything about the values placed on it, or how the institution expected it to be used.

Looking more specifically at the documents held by the archives, the catalogues were consulted in order to ascertain how far the descriptions of the holdings accurately reflected the types of record held. A central concern approaching these archives, was to ascertain if certain elements of artistic process and remains were not being considered, or given appropriate weighting. Going on to consider – if this was the case - what the implications for both the understanding of performances passed and the performance archive as a form might be.

In each case I undertook an initial review of the catalogue, in order to understand the types of document available, for example; video recordings, texts, sketches, photographs. These documents were reviewed, and a range from each type within the archives selected for viewing. The intention was to view a representative range from each archive, in order to report on its content and function within the wider field of performance archives.

Each document selected was read, viewed and analysed with the intention of understanding what the specific record (not the original performance) was doing. This is a key element of the analysis, the deemed quality or interest of the materials not being based in the absent work, but rather the record itself, its function within the archive, and the way in which it represents the practice. The following observations consider this functionality of the documents themselves, alongside reflections on the conventions and trends identified within each archive through this process of interrogating individual records.

### **2.2.1 British Library, Experimental Theatre and Live Art Archive**

The archive housed by the British Library places itself, in its naming (as an archive of

Experimental Theatre and Live Art), as being situated within a broad spectrum of potential subject matter. A point the Library acknowledges themselves in the introduction to the archive catalogue referring to their “documentation of a performance sector with ever fluid and contended boundaries.”<sup>164</sup> This is reflected by the type of documents included - some recorded performances carried out in theatre spaces by companies, others in studios, or to camera by performers who practice within the 'visual arts' category. The collection represents a varied process of acquisitions, with many recordings donated by the artists themselves, the theatres and arts spaces hosting the work, and a programme of recordings organised by the British Library themselves (ranging from a period 1985-1995, to a number of more contemporary commissioned recordings).

The collection represents a body of work by practitioners central to the experimental performance genre, and as such an archive valuable to the work of future researchers of this era and its key figures. Including international figures such as Abramović and Goat Island, the archive has a strong focus on British performance practice, including a separate Forced Entertainment collection, and pieces by influential figures such as the Wooster Group, or later waves of companies (Stan's Café, Blast Theory).

The placement of the work within the British Library might be viewed as slightly troubling for an archive of often radical practice, now situated within this aged, institutional site. In viewing the work the researcher is led into a small soundproofed hub (with leather cladding), within the Rare Books and Maps room. The experience is one of contrast, between the quiet scholarly endeavours and the at times loud, unsettling or disturbing work which is about to be viewed. It is striking to the viewer that the performers were unlikely to have made the work planning for it to be accessed in this manner of setting.

The catalogue indicates the library context of the institution and the nature of the archive as more akin to the collection. Documents are given numbered references for

---

<sup>164</sup> Stephen Cleary, “Experimental Theatre and Live Art: Audio and Video Recordings,” Text, accessed September 3, 2014, <http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelprestype/sound/drama/dramaex/experimental.html>.

the researcher to request files, without the fonds or levels seen within standardised archival description. The catalogue is ordered alphabetically, demonstrating the documents functioning as a collection or library of these recordings, rather than an archive 'proper'.

The collection is held under the umbrella of the Sound Archive, and as such indicates the approach of the Library toward the materials: that they view themselves as potentially responsible for recording and preserving these works, much in the way they do with aural histories. Despite the visual nature of the majority of the catalogue (DVD, video etc), this connection to the Sound Archive accounts for an emphasis on the AV recording as document, with, aside from the few programmes or CD-ROMS, there being little space for ephemera or other process related holdings within the archive.

Following the selection and viewing of a number of the records held a number of clear trends began to emerge across the range of AV recordings, particularly towards those works situated in theatre spaces during live performances to audiences. These recordings appear to be the standard to which the British Library have collected to, including those the institution commissioning as recordings themselves. This move toward creating the records and patronage shifts the British Library's role beyond that of the archival professions guidelines towards the role of collector. The tendency towards a certain type of recording selected for preservation also sets a precedent and expectation of what the performance archive might be or contain, with a clear emphasis placed on the recording of the performance event alone.

The Lead Curator for Drama and Performance Recordings, Stephen Clearly has written about the collection policy of the Library both past and present, and references the uncertainty with which documentation of this type can be made,

“...it may be that lesser known writers or performers will have risen to a prominence they do not enjoy today; and it may be that recordings of this kind will be interrogated for how the documented works or performances

translate or reflect an aspect of society, rather than for qualities of innate artistic achievement.”<sup>165</sup>

The library’s general collection policy (not just in terms of Experimental Theatre, but all dramatic recordings) is to work closely with partner venues in recording all works which are shown there either via audio or video means. However, this does mean that the majority of live art, existing outside of partner venues such as the V&A is likely to be excluded from the British Library’s own commissioned recordings.

The AV recordings made in theatres tend toward a set formula with clear conventions in the style of documentation employed. Often the recordings are made from a fixed position within or behind the audience seating. The archival researcher is given a viewpoint to mimic their presence within the actual theatre, amongst the crowd; often we watch as the theatre gradually fills with audience, milling past the camera with the hum of conversation until the house lights darken and the piece itself begins. Frequently these recordings were made with minimal editing (if any), and with only one camera, so we are presented with a wide shot that includes the entire stage. All these elements demonstrate an attitude towards the view we should experience the work as if we had been there through the document.

This specific style of recording the work is the standard to which the British Library have chosen to collect. Clearly states that this rough style of production values is reflected by the fact they are “intended for research use rather than commercial consumption, and the rough edges do not appear to put off serious researchers.”<sup>166</sup>

The archive holds collections of established companies’ work through their development (such as the large Forced Entertainment holdings, or even the smaller range of Blast Theory recordings), which also demonstrates some of the subtle shifts in filming and

---

<sup>165</sup> Clearly, Stephen, “Audio and Video Documentation of Performance at the British Library: 1963 to the Present,” in *Capturing the Essence of Performance*, ed. Leclercq, Nicole et al. (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), 122.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

documentation styles preferred over a number of decades. This includes the appreciable increase in recording quality over the decades (both in audio and visual). Works are visibly dated through time stamps present in the lower right corner of the screen, acting as a reminder of the passed nature of the event. Experimentation with multiple cameras and framing distances figures in the mid-1990s as the recording and editing equipment required became more readily available. Many of these aspects of the developing technology available date, and also clearly mark the recordings as documentation, rather than the work. These inclusions of timestamps and scrolling titles emphasise the distance from that live experience. Some documents are re-recorded onto DVD from video and include noise and tracking marks which evidences them as copies of copies. As Matthew Reason has pointed out, the deteriorating and distracting form of the recording further distances us from the live, and makes its absence even more marked. The original performance is distanced from the present, the outdated technology only further confirming this aporia.

With the majority of the AV documents meeting the conventions previously described, there were also a number of exceptions which demonstrated some of the potential transgressions possible within this manner of collection, and also highlighted the function of that larger body of records making up the whole. These three examples of alternative approaches existing within the collection demonstrate the elements of process and practice before the live event, which is absent from much of the archive, pointing toward potential strategies for its wider inclusion and the value of doing so for researchers.

The work included from Helena Hunter features a DVD recording relating to the *Tracing Shadows* performance (Chelsea Theatre, 2006), alongside catalogues and other printed materials related to the work's live showing and promotion. The production and editing of the recording indicate the specific choices made around creating this 'document', and the ways in which it differs from the majority of other live recordings accessed. The performance work takes place without the audience present, which becomes clear only when Hunter and the film maker begin conversations about the recording. These

comments ("can we move on", "that was perfect") only come part way into the film and effectively break the illusion and fourth wall that the slow and mesmeric movements of Hunter had built. As the film continues these moments of interruption continue: we also hear drilling from a nearby room, are witness to errors, all whilst the time stamp continues rolling in the bottom right screen. To include these glitches is a conscious choice - they could easily be edited out to produce a smoothly running performance, but instead they are kept in. They seem important to Hunter, in that we are reminded of the status of this event not as 'the work' but a performance to camera in an empty space. These moments allow Hunter to make clear the work being viewed is a documentary recording of a live piece. The camera becomes a new kind of audience, a witness to the gesture, proof that it took place, yet marked as different and separated from that live event of the promotional flyers and programme. In providing a recording of what is essentially a working through and testing of the piece, Hunter also allows her process to be made present within the archive. We are able, as researchers, to view the performer at work, testing and making mistakes. This is a significant element absent from much of the wider collection.

The audio recording *Audience. A Collection of Silences* (2006) by Rachel Gomme documents a number of silences from the project *Audience* where friends, family and the public were asked to 'perform' a silence to Gomme. This recording format clearly is intended to replicate the sense of being within and present for that silent moment, a video recording for this secondary audience would be distracting and full of visual material, using instead the aural recording only replicated the intensity and time of the original.

The CD-ROM produced by Kelli Dipple, collected together a variety of documents from a workshop and performance event including stills, text, film. The project was represented at various stages of development in what became a small scale archive, representing the process that was an important element of the exercise. However, a number of the stills and video clips would not play on the computers in the archive room (unclear if the fault was with the software incompatibility or the CDROM itself), which

demonstrates a problematic element in this format where information may be saved in a soon to be obsolete file format.<sup>167</sup>

In the case of the British Library's performance archive, it might more accurately be termed as a collection. The majority of the documents are AV recordings of work, which do generally not act as archival traces might in their 'pointing to *something* of the past', so much as an attempt to recreate it through documentary means. Essentially, these records have not been created as part of the process of the artist in making the work (as would be the strict definition for an artists' archive), instead they have been specifically commissioned, in some cases by the British Library itself, and as such they represent a collection of recorded performances. In this difference, it is perhaps the case that the institution of the British Library itself has affected the collections policy and how the 'archive' has gone on to be formed. Many of the other collections within the institution consist of a certain type of artefact: books, maps, sound recordings, so 'saving' the performances to video or DVD might seem the logical stance toward this collection. However, this singular approach to the collections policy is at the expense of other documents and artefacts which might give a wider context to the work and its reception, or the artists' process.

Undoubtedly, these collected recordings offer a valuable resource for analysing a range of influential past works and study the specifics of performance, essential to current and future performance scholars. Yet, it offers these researchers little insight into the process, research and choices made by the artists included in developing the works. This is a need potentially best occupied by smaller organisations, concentrating on individual artists, or those institutions taking an approach which separates the practice and its traces as its archival content.

---

<sup>167</sup> Since the original research visit undertaken in 2012, this document has been removed from the catalogue.



### 2.2.2 Tate Archive, David Mayor Collection

The Tate archive was accessed as a counter to the British Library, to consider if an institution of a different type might yield a different kind of performance archive. As an organisation, the Tate and its brand are considered a popular focal point for contemporary work, and increasingly so in terms of performance with the opening of the Tanks performance space, and a number of recent research projects thinking about how live work may exist (and remain) within the gallery collection. With this different relationship to the live, the Tate seemed it might offer a different perspective on the performance archive.

Holdings at the Tate are not grouped in the same manner as the British Library so there was no overt live art archive to access. The initial key difference was the surrounding context and the catalogue system. This far more represented what was laid out in the archival guidance handbooks, with a multi-levelled structure and descriptions of the sub-archival levels down to individual items. Following a process of searching the catalogue for keywords around performance, I selected the David Mayor archive, which details Fluxus work in the UK during the early to mid-1970s, Mayor's own mail art practice beyond this, and through the Beau Geste Press. The archive was acquired by Tate in 1981, with additional materials included in 1982 and 1992.

Most of this practice was performative, although very much within the gallery or site specific contexts rather than the theatre. This archive was selected as an expansive one in terms of the number of documents contained, yet also specific in terms of the section I concentrated on (that of the *Fluxshoe* exhibitions 1968-74) offering a fixed, closed, timespan and selection of artists. The selection represents a connection to my own practice as an interdisciplinary performance practitioner. An essential element for this archive's selection was the intention of the artists and Mayor himself in attempting to document the touring work and live practices beyond the AV recording.

The Tate archive separates out AV recordings into its library holdings – physically

distanced in being accessed within a separate space and through a different system and catalogue. However, the Mayor collection includes no AV material (there does exist a recording from a separate source of the collected films shown as part of the *Fluxshoe* exhibitions, available in the library), and is instead made up of photos, texts, publications and objects resulting from the performances. This is likely partly due to the timing of the work - before recording equipment was easily available - but also due to the more challenging nature of the work, these were smaller 'actions' which might not always have the clear audience/performer dichotomy which allowed for the fixed camera recording used in more theatrical contexts.

**TGA 815/2/2/5/7**<sup>168</sup>

**Typewriter Duel. Residue of a performance between D Mayor and Paul Woodrow at Nottingham Fluxshoe, 7 June 1973**

The object does not explain how the performance itself was carried out, rather we are left with the typed texts that occurred as a result of the performer's actions. This record does not explain, but adds to a sense of mythological legacy around performances from this era. The physical remains act as trace proper, they are from that moment passed, yet offer little insight into the actual events. This cryptic nature of the document fuels a sense of narrative, as opposed to photographs or film which would end speculation and absent the sense of performance.

Elements are written in the first person, from the viewpoint of the artist performing in that moment. As such, this offers a unique piece of documentation from within the performance itself, something the audience cannot access even if they were present. In this way the typewritten record creates and adds to a larger body of work around this

---

<sup>168</sup> The text in bold in the descriptions is that directly quoted from the catalogue. Included were the level and fond numbers, alongside the detailed description of each item, conforming to my expectations of a fully catalogued archive. These descriptions are included within the thesis in order to mark that difference between the British Library (a list of the titles of work and artists making up the catalogue) and Tate holdings.

original performance.

**TGA 815/2/2/5/12**

**Book Music. Paul Woodrow 1972. Performed without the artist at Oxford Fluxshoe February 1973.**

An exercise book, within which are a number of handwritten pages of instructions. These direct the performer to undertake the action described, then tear out the page in question (referred to as "performed pages"). There is a central contradiction in this object remaining intact within the archive. For the performance to be carried out as described the book would no longer remain, so either the performance did not take place as directed, or this book is a copy that has not been performed.

This type of instructional work occurs frequently within the Mayor archive, and remains of this type offer an example of the intratemporal in their existence across the before during and after of each performance. They act as both the record of what took place, and the potential instigator of a new work.

**TGA 815/2/1/13/5**

**Flux/performance photograph 1961 - 1976. Black and white.**

Brecht applies lemon oil to a violin. The image is out of focus and the specifics of the performance and photographer are unknown. The performer is staring intently at the instrument, it is uncertain whether this moment is during the performance, or just before whilst he prepares.

**TGA 815/2/2/4/54**

**Whisper/Writing Residue from Blackburn Performance David Thompson 7 July 1973. A number of cards with handwriting, simply bound with tag.**

Transcription:

*"I am whispering what I write and writing what I whisper."*

*"I began whispering and writing at 1.45pm, July 7 1973"*

*"You may listen to my writing."*

*“Does a poem exist if it is not documented by my writing?”*

*“The whispers predict the writing*

*The writing documents the whisper.”*

*“If I make a mistake in my writing, is it the documentation or the prediction that has failed?”*

The work acknowledges its own specific space in time and its continued passing. The making of documentation was essential to the staging of the work, an integral condition of it progressing. However this documentation also acknowledges its existence as a trace belonging to a performance, we are constantly reminded of the surroundings - a 1970s Blackburn library, the whispered tones of the performer becoming strained, the strangeness of the situation to the viewing public. The physicality of this site-specific work is missing from our document, although it does chart the time passing of the durational piece. And now, again, it is viewed in the hushed space of the institution.

The types of remains found demonstrate the wide potential for what a performance archive might be, particularly when situated in both a practice and institution aligned more with visual art rather than theatrical traditions. However, these varied archives are not usually the type discussed in literature around performance remains, instead this tends to focus specifically on film, photo and text (as scripts and performance notation). Much of the included documentation offers the potential for understanding of the live, whilst not attempting to replace or stand in its place as the AV recordings are accused of doing.

Potentially, this overlooking of alternative archival approaches occurs because the debate has originated in theatre studies as opposed to visual art disciplines, yet, performance art practice has been well established within the institutions of the visual arts (galleries, art schools). That this type of performance archive exists within the context of the art gallery and collection offers an insight into the alternative option available to other types of experimental live and durational work.

Although the Mayor archive at Tate offers a variety of alternative archival remains as created by the artists, it does not offer evidence of the works in development. Rather, the documents contained are made at the moment of performance itself, acting as alternative or auto-recording methods of archiving the work. Within this experimental archive there still exists a lack for the researcher who wishes to investigate the process of the artist beyond and preceding that live moment and encounter with the audience.

### **2.2.3 Siobhan Davies Dance, Online Archive**

This final archive selected for review is unlike the British Library and Tate in that it does not exist within an institutional space but instead online. The Siobhan Davies Dance archive project (titled *Siobhan Davies Replay*, a move itself indicating a different approach to the form) originates from an independent dance company, demonstrating how a small organisation may maintain control of their archive working in collaboration with academic institutions as opposed to those of larger museums/galleries. The archive is significant beyond dance alone, and into the wider performance art field, in both the contextualisation of Davies' work within galleries and art spaces, and the approach and structure of the archive which is a model applicable to the work of artists in the performance genre.

The Siobhan Davies Dance online archive is frequently referred to as an example of best practice in terms of performance documentation online, and is the first large scale dance archive site of its kind. The project was initiated in January 2007, launching in 2009 as a website, with funding from the AHRC, as a collaboration between the dance company and Coventry University (Sarah Whatley, a dance and performance focused academic was employed as the principle investigator). One of the aims of founding this online archive for the company was making the materials readily available to all researchers, audience members and practitioners. Rather than the closed institutional model common to the two previous examples, this archive also sought to expand the

audience for dance, and allow them to become active spectators in viewing the work, a key aim being to “challenge the authority of the archive” as an institution itself.<sup>169</sup>

The form of the archive as a digital and online only repository is significant in allowing for both elements of interactivity, inclusivity, and a shifting experimental presence. Whatley reflected on this digital form stating,

“...when the focus of the online archive is dance, which more than any other art form is concerned with the moving body in time and space, the ‘weightlessness’ of the digital archive reflects back on the temporality of dance; the ceaseless passing of dance.”<sup>170</sup>

The archive is one which considers and reflects upon its own form, suiting the storage and access of materials to the nature of the artistic work. Although, there are also clear practical advantages to the digital approach, the formless nature of digital also provides an appropriate synthesis between performance practices and their remaining within an archival structure such as this.

The site showcases a wide range of document types, particularly those materials relating to process, such as rehearsals and scratch footage, written notes and plans. A number of core dance works (almost 40) provide the focus around which the documents can be accessed by users. Whatley points toward the archive having 77,000 individual digital objects within its collection.<sup>171</sup> The website employs materials suited particularly well to the online environment such as video and sound documents which are transferred to a high standard of digital quality.

---

<sup>169</sup> Sarah Whatley, “Dance Encounters Online: Digital Archives and Performance,” in *Performing Archives/Archives of Performance*, ed. Borggreen, Gunhild and Gade, Rune (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2013), 165.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 164.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 168.



Figure 13: *Bird Song*, Production shot 19 (2004). 35mm colour negative contact sheet of images taken during rehearsals.

<http://www.siobhandaviesreplay.com/record.php?id=1514&view=metadata&hit=28>



Figure 14: *Bird Song*, Rehearsal 1 (2004). Tammy Arjona in the performing space



The non-physical holdings have a key advantage in that they are digitised and housed within a format which cannot deteriorate, although as with all web holdings access could potentially be limited through server issues and other online issues. The process of creating the archive itself, although in a non-physical format – has resulted in the creation of a vast bank of meta-data and additional information, which in lieu of a catalogue allows the for access and browsing of content, creating connections between works.

Easily navigable for both specific searches and browsing, the archive also offers 'kitchens' which offer a creative visualization of the process and collaborative nature of the work's development. These navigable elements flow and link together offering a new way of thinking about the records accessed as part of a dynamic and fluid process. This experimental method of presenting the data has offered an indication of how the digital archive might offer a more suitable environment to access the remains of arts practice.

This site also houses 'scrapbooks' compiled by invited contributors and registered visitors. This allows us to trace how those involved with the company have chosen to navigate the archive, and also allows researchers and practitioners to curate their own collections of resources for their own use. The opening up of the tool for registered users also works to move the audience member or research to participate in a form of active spectatorship within the archive, whilst also acknowledging the form of the archive as one which is open to subjectivity and not necessarily that of a fixed structure.

This dynamic and intuitive online archive has been produced with the temporality of the subject and connection with an audience in mind. Choices in navigation through the files and resources is changeable, with each excursion and pathway offering a unique experience comparable to that of an audience at a live show. The process of viewing the archive (much as is the case for Latham's) becomes itself a live and unrepeatable series of actions. The large collection of materials relating to the process behind the work – scratch footage demonstrating the dancers working through movements as an example – offer a view that the finished work's audience never had. In this way the

Siobhan Davies Dance archive offers an experience of the work which adds to the knowledge around the practice, rather than being documents which threaten to overwhelm the pieces.

The use for dancers and the company itself was made clear in the Siobhan Davies 2014 piece *Table of Contents* where the performers made explicit reference to using the resources and scratch footage featured online in order to develop their own 're-performance' of works. This demonstrates the value of the resource in featuring materials relating to the process of performance, rather than just the finished product. For both performers and researchers the inclusion of this scratch rehearsal footage has allowed for a tracing of the tacit artistic choices made by the performer, in that moment of creation. Uniquely, the online nature of the archive also allows those materials to be shared with a wider audience, who may also be viewing the finalised performances themselves simultaneously, charting the work's development.

### **2.3 Taxonomy of the Performance Archive**

The research carried out within the three archives, alongside additional research into existing literature into the performance archive, led me to form a taxonomic system in order to survey, describe and further interrogate the contents of both archives within institutions, and that of my own practice. This has allowed me to further define the specific content of the archive, and understand the structure and makeup of the performance archive specifically.

Having carried out a review of literature around the performance archive, it became clear the terms 'archive' and 'document' were being used interchangeably (by both artists and researchers) to describe an array of record types. In creating this emergent taxonomy, I have analysed how each distinct category functions in isolation: where later work will combine and move across these boundaries, they first require a setting out as individual elements.

This taxonomy operates in a two part structure, with the physical components and their properties making up the first section. The second part is focused on the more theoretical aspects: formless but nonetheless, observable properties of performance's remains within the archive. This separate nature of the two elements exemplifies the cleft and oppositional structure of the archive as observed by Derrida. Indeed, it could be argued that the latter section is itself counter-archival in nature. Although the components allow the work to be disseminated and marked in memory; this takes place in direct contrast to the physical archive and its need for tangible evidence.

In this taxonomy, the individual elements and their relationship to both the archive and performance work are considered. Clearly, not all are suitable in every instance, and the implications vary depending upon the original work. The ways in which performances are accessed and disseminated beyond the work's immediate reach might be better suited through considering the options available in the initial planning stages.

The material nature of the first half is offset by the theoretical focus of the second. It was important to allow these material components an equal status with the academic discussion of the form and implications of the archive. These material elements are the epistemic matter ('things') which make up the archive, yet due to the narrative of disappearance within performance studies, they are frequently ignored or given lesser status.

### **2.3.1 Photography**

Photographs of live work are perhaps the most common form of performance documentation found within artist's personal and institutional archives, yet these images also hold the potential to transform into ciphers which exceed the original performance. Iconic images might come to stand for the work, replacing the memory of the original in the case of those who bore witness to events, and acting as a proxy viewing for those

who did not. As records which can easily be read as independent art works removed from the performance, photographs represent a contested ground, where the live moment might come to be usurped by its image.

However, more than simply 'replacing memories', photography has a complex history intertwined with that of the development of performance practice. Images taken have lent defined aesthetics to the historic narrative of performance's past, which would not otherwise have existed. These photographic records vary in type and the method of creation: during the work with audience present, a private re-enactment of a piece, staged poses from the performance, or a work devised solely for the camera (as discussed previously in reference to the work of Sherman). With each of these scenarios the truth or accuracy we might associate with these archival traces shifts, yet as viewers we are often only told they are 'performance documentation', and accept them as such, as a trace of the live moment.

The early development of performance art and its associated documentary photographic style set a tone and aesthetic blueprint (mainly dictated by the technology available and the environment the work was performed in), which has come to represent much of the era's practice and still influences images made today. These 1960s photographs were generally black and white stills shot in low light conditions, taken in an immediate and candid manner as the work was carried out. This aesthetic, with its highly stylised properties, tend to be how we (those not present at the original performance, a later audience) 'see' the work. It is as though this performance practice evolved in a colour drained, grainy, 'other' time. We can only access this false memory of the photographic remains, and simulate an experience through them. This interaction further distances the original live moment from the document, which now also, arguably, holds its own independent status as an artwork.

The research project *Live Art on Camera: Performance and Photography* by Alice Maude-Roxby examined the collaborative process between performers and photographers, disseminated as both a publication and exhibition. This body of work

interrogates the performance photograph in order to understand how it was created, and how accurately it depicts the performance event. Maude-Roxby's research process included interviewing both the performers and photographers about how they viewed the resulting images, considering what the photo documents didn't or couldn't include (i.e., what was out of frame, the auditory, how the audience were responding). This approach to the research is unusual, in that it includes the photographer's viewpoint as an equal status collaborator, rather than assuming the images simply capture the performance as the artist intended, or asked for it to be carried out.

Another aspect of Maude-Roxby's research included examining the different value status given to the images - particularly evident in how the prints and negatives were cared for, ranging from in controlled museum and archive environments, to the walls of art collectors, to shoeboxes in studios or under beds.

Maude-Roxby aligns her approach with that of Aby Warburg's *Atlas* project, in that both seek a common aesthetic language of the human form across the historical narrative of a fixed period. In Maude-Roxby's case this is through interrogating the developing archive of performance practice, whereas Warburg's study spanned artworks from antiquity to the Renaissance. She notes that the overriding trends in how performance is photographed has a marked effect on the images produced, and subsequent readings of the live work itself. This potentially leads to work that is in fact very different in style and content being connected later by researchers due to the visual similarities in the photo archive.

"Within the contexts of these different archives, I saw documentation of seminal performances immersed in entirely different image contexts that are individual and characteristic of each photographer's or artist's ongoing practice."<sup>172</sup>

---

<sup>172</sup> Alice Maude-Roxby and John Hansard Gallery, *Live Art on Camera : Performance and Photography / Edited by Alice Maude-Roxby*. (Southampton: John Hansard Gallery, 2007), 1.

Interviewed by Maude-Roxby, Carolee Schneeman states that photographic documentation by others was an important element of her exhibited practice. Linking back again to the Warburg method Schneeman "found visual connections past the event of the performance: a visual history of her practise immersed in a wider history of image making."<sup>173</sup> It is noted that a wide range of photographic styles depict the performance work of Schneeman, even within a single event, and this is not unique to her particular practice. The tone which these works are assumed to have taken is sometimes set by images which might only glimpse one moment, out of context. At *Meat Joy* (1964) 12 different photographers were present, and according to Schneeman,

"They have captured the same moment but their photographs are completely different: camera eye, position, exposure, focal length, film stock. That is their art. It is quite mysterious. I learn so much from the photographs with which my drawings form image history. The ones I most cherish are the photographs replicating my initial drawings."<sup>174</sup>

That Schneeman values these images that represent a symbiosis with her own vision of the work, suggests there is indeed a potential for collaboration between performer and photographer, but one which might be elusive and not necessarily always occur. It is in a moment of symmetry that Schneeman points to a dialogue having emerged. In considering how this process might be negotiated, Maude-Roxby notes that how performance photography is viewed and read has shifted from documentary proof, to an art object in its own right.

"...it has changed from the nature of a relic (where the action took place once) to part of a practice, which incorporates representations of performance within it."<sup>175</sup>

---

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 6–7.

One contemporary photographer working with performance artists is Manuel Vason, who often instigates work by asking the performers to collaborate with him in creating images. In this way what might be considered the normal sequence of events and value system is turned around; the documentary mode of the photograph is what initiates the live event. In the publication project (which Maude-Roxby contributed text towards), *Exposures* (2002), Vason invited a number of artists to collaborate with him, creating new performances or performative moments that would be witnessed and recorded only by the photographs he took.

These collaborations were limited by the particular circumstances which Vason had set for the project: in each instance only 10 sheets of Polaroid film could be used over one day of shooting. This particular method for the creation of a situation and framework for dialogue between performer and photographer to exist within could be (and was) replicated multiple times. The resulting images bear out this immediacy and freshness of approach - documenting the collaborative process itself. Each series of images holds traces of both Vason's particular aesthetic and approach in making images along with the traces of the performer's distinct individual practice. However, the artists selected all are of a certain type of performance, focused specifically on making work testing the limitations of their own physicality and audience response to that body.

*Exposures* offers a shift in the relationship between performer and photographer – although described as collaboration, it is Vason's project and publication, and the process of creating the images is collaboration with the limitations and boundaries set by the 'documentor' rather than performer.



Figure 15: Manuel Vason in collaboration with Aaron Williamson, *Exposures*, (2002)



Writing about Vason's practice in *Encounters*, Schneider describes the photograph in this context functioning in a "performance of duration"<sup>176</sup> where the live moment is re-printed, viewed, encountered and re-performed multiple times. Although functioning as the trace which Ricoeur described - always pointing to a past moment - the photographs "still exist without being limited by this tie to a passed moment."<sup>177</sup>

These images are distributed through Vason's publications (and also his online gallery), and whilst existing as a trace of the performance and moment of collaboration between two artists, they do not function as documentation images within the archive proper. Rather, these images are a challenge to the institutional archival collection, functioning as both artwork and documentation, occupying the artists' publication as a state between the gallery and archive.

Thinking about photographs in this way, as a potential site for performance, Schneider recognises the limitations that have been set on the live as fixed only ever within the present, "in a linear and disappearing present" which "limits our thinking in significant ways."<sup>178</sup> Questioning our relationship to the live in this way allows the performance photograph to take on a new significance and status as the artwork, the performance itself. Instead of usually depicting in the photograph what the viewer missed, according to Schneider the practice of artists such as Vason shifts the function of these images and "invites another approach."<sup>179</sup>

### 2.3.2 Film

If photography was a constant presence alongside the development of performance practices, then AV recording technology developed from cinefilm, to video, to digital

---

<sup>176</sup> Manuel Vason and Dominic Johnson, *Encounters: Manuel Vason: Performance, Photography, Collaboration* (Bristol: Arnolfini, 2007), 34.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

alongside the form, and with this evolution the availability of recording equipment increased. What had once been a specialist and expensive method of recording work, became simple to operate and relatively cheap, leading to its increased presence at performance events. The emergence of artist video practices were partly borne out of the performance genre, with artists moving between the two genres (particularly feminist practitioners such as Martha Rosler, able to establish themselves in these two developing fields). Performance to camera as carried out by those video artists (such as Rosler) is separated from AV documentation in this section of my study, as the work produced is deemed as the completed work within the emergent video art genre, as opposed to documentation of performance intended to enter the archive.

One early example of a performer encountering a film recording for the first time is Marina Abramović in the 1975 work *Art Must be Beautiful, Artist Must be Beautiful*. Retelling this experience in a keynote lecture from Frieze 2006 (as recalled by Louis Keidan in the text *Double Exposure* included in Vason's *Encounters*), Abramović recalled watching an initial filming of a performance which was carried out with the audience present, the artist making no particular change in her style due to the cameras presence. However, the resulting film was,

"...something that conveyed, for her, neither the intention nor experience of the performance itself. She destroyed the footage and immediately re-performed the piece to camera, creating the iconic work that we have come to know."<sup>180</sup>

Keidan goes on to question where the art (the performance) is in this video document. It does not represent the live audience's view of the work, but has come to replace this in our envisioning of, and the mythology around, the work. We imagine this is what the audience saw. By Schneider's logic of situating the photograph as a space for performance, we might also argue the performance is continued in the context of each

---

<sup>180</sup> Lois Keidan, "Double Exposure," in *Encounters: Manuel Vason: Performance, Photography, Collaboration*, by Manuel Vason and Dominic Johnson (Bristol: Arnolfini, 2007), 18.



Figure 16: Marina Abramović, *Art Must Be Beautiful; Artist Must Be Beautiful*, (1975)



Figure 17: Marina Abramović, *Art Must Be Beautiful; Artist Must Be Beautiful*, (1975)

viewing of the film (now digitised and available online).<sup>181</sup> Keidan states that, "How it is categorised depends perhaps on who is doing the categorising: the artist herself, an art historian, performance critic or archivist."<sup>182</sup> From this comment we might assume the archivist would be keen to recognise the work as documentation of a live performance, thus an acceptable inclusion to the archive, yet how the artist and critic decide on the status of the piece is more open to debate. Thinking through the implications of Abramović's process Keidan states,

"...her intention was to document a live act, while her failure compelled her to devise a new strategy for working - a new way of collaborating - with the camera."<sup>183</sup>

Matthew Reason has written at length about various types of performance documentation in his text *Documentation, Disappearance and the Representation of Live Performance*, with one section exploring 'video documents' in particular (the majority of the archive consisting of video in 2006 when the text was published, although this was already being challenged by the rise of DV tapes and other digital technologies). Within the text Reason notes why video in particular has arisen as a contentious, although prevalent, mode of documentation for performance. In part this is due to the "seductive" qualities of video, in "offering the potential to record, retain and preserve performance history; offering the potential to halt disappearance."<sup>184</sup> Undoubtedly, the video technology allows each movement of a performer to be tracked and replayed. Particularly for dance disciplines this offers the potential for work to be kept in the archive, and not 'lost' in the way that a number of earlier key works had been. (This attitude is demonstrated more recently in the scratch rehearsal tapes stored

---

<sup>181</sup> Marina Abramović: *Art Must Be Beautiful; Artist Must Be Beautiful*, 1975, 2013, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1smoNE6Stc&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1smoNE6Stc&feature=youtube_gdata_player).

<sup>182</sup> Lois Keidan, "Double Exposure," 18.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Matthew Reason, *Documentation, Disappearance and the Representation of Live Performance* (Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 76.

on the Siobhan Davies Dance archive website, and the approach of making these resources widely and freely available.)

However, Reason asserts that this promise to halt the vanishing of work equally puts into risk the status of the original live performance. As had been said of photography, the filmed record could potentially come to replace the live act. The AV document (whether video, film or digital recording) seems more likely to carry out this threat "as a medium of performance in its own right",<sup>185</sup> which demonstrates a linear, temporal experience of the work through the document.

Reason also describes the "lost promise" of "an imaginary archive of lost performances". Unlike the frequently imagined museum of lost art these performances have not been wilfully or accidentally lost - it is in their nature "with an imaginary archive of performance where loss is more automatic, immediate yet passive."<sup>186</sup> Here, the difference between the visual and performance practices is made clear; visual art objects generally remain, unless some special effort has been made to destroy them, whereas performance in contrast must be consciously chosen to create documentation from. Yet, the potential video recordings of these performances, according to Reason, only let us recognise that they have been lost (as in the case of the dances remembered but no longer known).

That AV recordings are so popular "often exhibits an instinctive (and hence often unconsidered) acceptance of video as a documentary medium",<sup>187</sup> as Reason recognises the perceived reality of the recordings is usually the main cause. This is often aided by the low quality of the recordings made of work; inexpertly framed, unedited, with poor sound quality.

"It is this perception of transparency and directness, the ability to capture

---

<sup>185</sup> Ibid, 74.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid, 77.

images that are mimetic to what we consider reality, which fuels much of the desire to video (as a verb) as a documentary act."<sup>188</sup>

This quote demonstrates that the action of recording might be considered by some as also the act of archiving (as verb), as though they are bypassing what might be considered the usual practices of selection and cataloguing, with video that behaves as the post-positivistic view of the document did, as an absolute truth.

The physical qualities of video as a medium are also discussed, that the tapes degrade with each viewing and are easily damaged is even more relevant now and many institutions have begun the process of digitisation. Reason describes this fragility of the medium and points out that many have asserted, "not only that video is ephemeral, but also that this ephemerality is not substantially different from that of live performance."<sup>189</sup> However this is qualified by pointing out that the central difference between performance and video is that the latter "*aspires* to permanence."<sup>190</sup> Although the tapes are open to degradation and destruction this requires action, rather than the inevitable slippage and ephemerality with which Reason imbues performance.

Considering how these documents are viewed and accessed Reason also asks how we can judge the success of these videos - should the recordings be viewed as entertainment in their own right, or is their success qualified in how accurately they represent the original live act? Video allows viewer to pause, RW, FF, etc. "provides viewers with a limited form of power and control"<sup>191</sup>. In terms of viewing tapes Reason locates the performance-audience dynamic as being at "its most exploded and dislocated position, with temporal and spatial simultaneity shattered" with a lack of "cohesion within the audience experience."<sup>192</sup>

---

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid, 78–9.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

These recordings are agreed to be essential for the ongoing study and narrative of performance within academic studies. As Amelia Jones has pointed out in the essay *Presence in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation*, many younger academics and practitioners were not able to experience first-hand much of performance's key historical works. Recordings allow for a history and academic accessibility which does not privilege live viewing of all works discussed. Jones recognises that whilst there is a clear separation between the viewing of an archival document and the live work itself, "neither has a privileged relationship to the historical 'truth' of the performance".<sup>193</sup> Jones also goes on to state that there is potentially an equal degree of interactions taking place between the audience and archive, as there is between the live audience and performer.

To access and view the video document assumes a specialised interest; a process of looking and searching for the document has been undertaken. As an audience, the archival viewer has sought out the document and entered into a different type of relationship with the performer. The recorded work allows for a refigured encounter between audience and artist.

"What the video document certainly does do is turn the event into archive; this archival quality not only means that we have to study it, but also attempts to make us want to study it..."<sup>194</sup>

These specific qualities of the video in creating a different relationship between the viewer and artist, offers an archival experience translated into the work of researchers and subsequent readings of the recorded piece. The offer of the video record also, according to Reason, attracts the likelihood of academic investigation, in the promise of a re-enactment of sorts which constitutes of a relationship formed between the artist/document and audience/researcher.

---

<sup>193</sup> Amelia Jones, "'Presence' in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation," *Art Journal* 56, no. 4 (1997): 11.

<sup>194</sup> Reason, *Documentation, Disappearance and the Representation of Live Performance*, 90.

Reason notes that the document can be marked as such by the way it is recorded and presented, in order to disrupt and change the nature of that exchange between the document and its viewer. Some advocate "the construction of partial and intentionally awkward recordings that deliberately resist attempts to be read as television."<sup>195</sup> This attitude was borne out in my own archival research – viewing the work of Helena Hunter in the British Library archive, where the artist actively acknowledged the fourth wall by breaking from the gestural sequence to make comments on the work, and how it was being translated to screen.

"By deliberately seeking to bring the limitations of the medium and the fact of mediation to the forefront of the representation, the absent live performance becomes, ironically, more visible."<sup>196</sup>

Reason concludes his thoughts on the medium of the video document by reflecting on the medium as one which ultimately accentuates the absence of the passed work. This stance mirrors in attitude that of other commentators writing on the photograph (Phelan in particular). The video record, it seems, further extends the promise of the photograph in offering the temporality and exchange of the performance reproduced within the archive – and upon finding this is still ultimately a different experience from the live, that distance between the two seems further still.

### **2.3.3 Text**

When performance practices are discussed in terms of conventional theatrical productions, the script is often returned to as the key source for academics and practitioners researching a work. In this way, the text could enter the archive as a

---

<sup>195</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.



blueprint for all subsequent versions of a work, however, it could give little information on the specifics of each work and the individual performances. This category of the archival taxonomy expands beyond the script into reflective and performative writings (occurring both before and after the performance).

Considering the written documentation of work Reason cites the "transformative effect" of creating texts *about* performance (in reference to reviews), stating,

"...it is exactly the transformative nature of writing that is of interest here, using it as the prism through which to explore what is valued, remembered and understood about the absent live performance."<sup>197</sup>

Focusing particularly on the review in his study, Reason goes on to discuss the function of this very specific form of text documentation. It operates as an aspect of the performance archive that is widely circulated and accessed before its admission as 'document': more so even, in many cases, than the performance itself. They must present the performers to readers who (the writer assumes) were not there to witness it, and as such attempt to represent the work. Reason describes this as the review being akin to the performance as "a form of *doing* or a kind of action in its own right."<sup>198</sup>

"That these representations *become* documentations (become, in archives, the material of theatre history) is a secondary function, if also the default result of the transient nature of live performance."<sup>199</sup>

The form itself embodies a sense of live-ness in its publication and consumption phase, before being admitted to the personal and institutional archives of those involved in the production, and taking on a new role as marker of what was in a differing archival context.

---

<sup>197</sup> Ibid, 183.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

Moving on from discussions of reviews to more interpretive writing, Reason cites a difference between the more straightforward "language as referent to what is absent", and "writing that positions the reader as encountering the language itself."<sup>200</sup> However, Reason's discussion of written artefacts remains linked to the review format and purpose, without moving on to explore the potential of those forms of writing which encourage a direct encounter between text and reader as audience, or consider the position of these within an archival framework.

In work which further explores the complexities of performance writing and the archive, Schneider positions that there is a "faulty distinction between text and performance"<sup>201</sup> and though the two might be set in binary opposition we could equally view them as a cohesive whole. In terms of this study, the implications of this would be in valuing these text remains as an expression of the piece, equal in weight and terms of status to the live work. In the distancing of writing from performance, Schneider questions if we might not see the performance itself as a document, or re-performance of the text (script) as the original. The live action potentially becomes itself a process of recording what has gone. Using the example of *Hamlet*, Schneider states that:

"...the live is a troubling trace of a precedent text and so (herein lies the double trouble) comes afterward, even arguably remains afterward, as a *record* of the text *set in play*."<sup>202</sup>

This attitude toward the performative text is in contrast to a more straightforward positioning of the script within the archive as object. Instead, the more complex reading of Schneider allows us to view the text as potential trace – operating both before and after the performance, even in excess of it.

---

<sup>200</sup> Ibid, 206.

<sup>201</sup> Rebecca Schneider, "In the Meantime: Performance Remains," 89.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid, 90.

Della Pollock's essay *Performative Writing*, (published in 1997 in a book edited by Phelan), put forward a key argument about how writing might function alongside and as performance. By positioning 'textuality' as an uncertain and shifting thing, Pollock draws it closer in function to the form of performance and the archive themselves. In this vision of performative writing, its potential is explored as a poetic, contradictory and complex, in a state of liminality between one state and another. There seems a clear connection between Pollock's understanding of performative writing and Schneider's framing of text as in excess of the live act. To Pollock, the writing and action of carrying out that gesture,

"...becomes meaningful in the material, the discontinuous act of writing. Effacing itself twice over – once as meaning and reference, twice as deferral and erasure – writing becomes itself, becomes its own means and ends, recovering to itself the force of action."<sup>203</sup>

Pollock connects the erasure of self and subject following the work and Adorno and others post Second World War, and that in this void language as writing shifts into something other, a statement of witnessing. According to Pollock, performative writing "forms itself in the act of speaking/writing."<sup>204</sup>

And "collapses distinctions by which creative and critical writing are typically isolated."<sup>205</sup>

We might consider performers and writers such as Fiona Templeton and Tim Etchells in relation to Pollock's theories around performative writing – both author the works that go on to be performed, yet also create further work through text resulting from their documentation.

---

<sup>203</sup> Pollock, Della, "Performative Writing," in *The Ends of Performance*, ed. Phelan, Peggy and Lane, Jill (London: New York University Press, 1998), 75.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid, 80.

“Performative writing is *evocative*. It operates metaphorically to render absence present – to bring the reader into contact with ‘other-worlds’, to those aspects and dimensions of our world that are other to the text as such by re-making them.”<sup>206</sup>

Templeton with her work *You – The City* (1988) produced a script text intended for an audience member of one, allowing for an immersive, site-specific piece of live work which was led by a text. However, the play also exists as a publication, now quite separate from the live work the reader can experience the piece as both document and literary work in its own right. As Pollock hints, this manner of writing has the potential to re-make or render re-envisioning of the live gesture.

---

<sup>206</sup> Ibid, 80.

*The second time I went  
through the piece, some  
person off the street joined  
us and kind of was hanging  
behind me, very closely.  
There was a new performer  
there, Michael, and the man  
sat next to us on the steps,  
and was so involved he  
wanted to get into the car  
too. But Michael said to  
him, "There's only room for  
one." And at that point I  
really felt like I was  
hallucinating  
because... "Who are these  
people, where are we going?"*

Even if you can not enter the church,  
the dispossession is apt and usable. You  
can see in and you can look from.

Your "you" is also "You", though You  
might be "Them" to you. You want to  
tell them.

\*\*\*

You may kneel.

*When Luis got to that line,  
"You don't need the big  
dick," he would often kind of  
indicate with his eyes this  
huge building under  
construction a few blocks up  
town. So this friend of mine  
who was working for Ogilvy  
and Mather realized that  
this was their new building.  
He couldn't believe it  
because he'd been thinking  
of quitting, and did right  
after that.*

Let silence deepen. Catch the client out  
of it and into a confessional mood.

Changeover

Figure 18: Fiona Templeton, *You - The City* (1990), pp. 34

### **2.3.4 An Alternative Taxonomy**

The second section of this taxonomic structure of the performance archive moves from a consideration of the specific media employed in the creation of documents, to a review of the form and function beyond the conventional, institutional body of the archive. The scope of this second part of the taxonomy is guided by Derrida's reading of archival elements as 'inscriptions', rather than the more practical and physical considerations of archival practice's existing reviews of constituent elements of the form.

This move into the less recognised aspects of the performance archive is specific to, and enabled by that particular form. The qualities of the performance particularly lend it to being reproduced, repeated, mythologised or represented in these ways within the archive.

### **2.3.5 Artefact**

Performance archives have the potential to contain a number of objects which are connected to the production of the live work, yet have not been created for the specific purpose of documentation. These artefacts occur naturally through the practice of the artists involved, and now remain (at times uneasily) within the archive. These artefacts are a by-product of practice, elements which can make little claim to replace the performance work in the way which a document such as a filmed performance might. (And so can exist as a less controversial element of performance archives – a way for the work to remain which does not compromise its status as an embodied practice.). Artefacts are sometimes marked as curios or ephemera when they are catalogued. At times their value is underplayed, in that they do not function or so readily offer information to researchers in the same way a video or photographic document might. However, the artefact offers a snapshot, an insight into the process and practice of the artist, the objects and elements required to produce a body of work.

Within the archive specifically the artefact has the potential to lend the collected remains what Benjamin might term 'aura'. The artefact is an element that enabled part of the artistic process (however insignificant or unassuming the item may seem), and as such it holds a unique value. Like the trace, it need not communicate any of that meaning or value in an immediate fashion, yet, within the context of the archive this aura and value can be combined with documents in creating a broader understanding of the individual or work.

An artefact evidences the process of making work. It exists *in excess* of the document: that which is planned (and potentially non-representative). It is something potentially counter to the official record. These qualities allow the artefact to exist as 'other' from the document and at times the archival structure itself. With a certain amount of repositioning there can be evidenced a shift, allowing these artefacts to be deemed as artworks (in the visual art context). This is observable particularly in the case of artists who have the qualities of a mythical aura and following, the artefacts taking on a function similar to the relic, and elevated to an independent work. These items exist within the institutional archive, private collections, studios, boxes in attics, or are potentially disposed of. The artefact is a shifting form, and with this comes wild variations in its perceived value.

Joseph Beuys frequently reclaimed artefacts of his performances, re-worked into new pieces of art. This was done with the origins of the objects made clear, the aura of this past use an integral element of the piece. As an audience, we cannot be certain that these originary performances ever occurred, but the shift from found object to artefact nonetheless takes place, imbuing these elements both with a sense of the work's narrative and equally the absence of that event. The *Vitrines* shown at the Tate Modern collected these artefacts of Beuys' past performances and process, creating a new series from these relics of previous practice. They acted both as an archive and new body of work, creating new meaning through the juxtaposition of the remains.

The Bristol University performance archives, in particular offer a number of examples of

small archives which include objects. A recent acquisition, the Franko B archive, contains a number of objects which were either used in the performances or important to the process of the artist from the studio. Equally, there are many artefact items (such as matchbooks and postcards) within the archive which cannot be connected to works immediately. The qualities of many of the objects contained – blood stained fabrics, the reoccurring motif of the cross both drawn and in found objects – along with the large and devoted following of the artist, mirror the qualities of the Catholic relic. The literal traces of the artist are included within the artefacts and increases their value or authenticity.

The artist Barry Le Va, whose work was within the gallery centric visual arts world, but his object based practice was concerned with the process by which the work was made, and in how his actions had affected the materials and space. In this way Le Va could be viewed as a performer whose output was the remains of those actions. In works such as '*scatterpieces*' 1966-68 Le Va presented sculptural installations, "with arrangements of unconventional materials such as flour, chalk, glass or oil, which invited readings through their tracing out of an earlier action or event."<sup>207</sup>

There is also a precedent of visual artists who may be termed sculptors whose works veer into the territory of performance, evidenced by the assemblages of artefacts which remain. Rebecca Horn created costumes to perform in (usually directly to camera), which were also displayed and sold as sculptural objects. Other artists who classify themselves as sculptors, include performative elements either live or to camera. In the case of Le Va, the artefacts of a gestural and performative process - archival materials - are framed as sculptural objects in the gallery context. The value had shifted from what the objects demonstrate of the artist's passed actions, to an artwork whose value (for the visual arts audience) is in the sculptural form as commodity rather than the potential insights into Le Va's work as a performer. However, it seems evident that the work was a record of artistic process and an exploration of how this might be traced through

---

<sup>207</sup> Nick Kaye, *Art into Theatre: Performance Interviews and Documents* (Australia: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996), 41.



objects, Le Va himself stating:

"I could literally piece together the day's events or my activity by how things just accumulated or lay on the floor or the table... the notions of residue accumulating through chance or through an activity interested me."<sup>208</sup>

In this object based form of documentation the divisions between visual and performance fields begin to collapse, as do the definitions of what might be considered an artefact or an artwork in its own right. The object based remains of works by artists such as Le Va and Horn exemplify the manner in which artefacts entirely suited to the performance archive, may simultaneously be positioned within the visual, and gallery based, situation.

### **2.3.6 Myth**

Due to its physical nature the artefact acts as a bridge in this taxonomy, between the more established forms of performance documentation, and other, counter-archival forms which although valid elements in relation to the performance archive are not readily acknowledged within the wider archival field. Mythology in particular is difficult in both its nature as an essentially unqualifiable element, and that it usually is a central archival component of those works with little or no other documentation or artefact remains. These pieces which have no other remaining form tend to be lengthy endurance works, or in some other way remarkable in their intent. Others are the creation of artists who actively place a ban on all forms of recording of the work, or any physical remainder of it (such as in the case of Tino Sehgal). These practitioners are lent an air of mystery and mysticism through producing definitive works witnessed by few, if any, audience. However, this mythical status is not enjoyed by every work which happens to have no permanent archival remains, so clearly a more complex navigation

---

<sup>208</sup> Ibid, 43.

between availability, status and mythology is taking place.

One piece which demonstrates these qualities is *The Lovers* (1988) by Marina Abramović and Ulay, who each walked one half of the Great Wall of China before meeting in the middle. In her essay *The Lovers on the Great Wall and Beyond*, Chloe Johnston describes the process of mythologising a work with few witnesses. Johnston puts forward the notion that durational works such as this last until a secondary audience is made aware of them, and that this creation of legacy is part of the work, she writes,

"Certain performances are created in defiance of their own temporality. *The Lovers* was staged with an eye towards the secondary audience. Marina and Ulay were conscious of the role of myths and myth-making in this performance."<sup>209</sup>

Through creating a work considered grand and impossible the artists are able to eschew more traditional documentation. Indeed, the lack of documentation adds to this legacy according to Johnston, further aggrandising its status as somehow other. A series of photographic images of the work do exist (taken by Abramović and her guide), yet they seem to define the work far less than the surrounding narrative.

In addition to this photographic documentation is Murray Grigor's film of the work. An often overlooked element of this work (and rarely referred to in any accounts of the piece), Grigor spent time with both Abramović and Ulay on sections of the walk, creating an hour long documentary of the journey for UK television. The film *The Great Wall: Lovers at the Brink* (1990) goes beyond the rough and immediate form of performance video we might expect, instead creating a highly polished work in its own right. Both Ulay and Abramović give voice-overs to the piece creating a poetic narration, interspersed with scenes of the surrounding local residents and landscape.

---

<sup>209</sup> Chloe Johnston, "The Lovers': On the Great Wall and beyond," *Performance Research* 17, no. 5 (October 1, 2012): 19.

This film functions differently to other documentary footage of Abramović and Ulay's practice: it is as though a piece with such a grand ambition and narrative surrounding it needed to exist beyond the archival footage which might exist. The supposed 'lack' of documentation referred to in discussions of the piece allow commentators to focus upon the mythic qualities, and re-make the work for their own particular means each time it is discussed.

Mythology acts as a counter to the physical archive, another way to mark the absent work. It is a narrative that takes on a pseudo-performative role itself, passed on and replicated by critics and an engaged community. What goes on to be documented in texts and criticism is not the original work, but the performance of the mythology in reaching that point.



Figure 19: Marina Abramović and Ulay, *The Lovers* (1988)



Figure 20: Marina Abramović and Ulay, *The Lovers*, (1988)

Alongside Grigor, the two performance critics Carr and McEvilley were some of the few Westerners to experienced the work, in a sense as performers themselves taking part in the durational journey, and becoming part of its surrounding mythology. These writers' accounts are the way most 'experienced' the work at the time (especially since Grigor's film was not screened until two years later), as a secondary audience who cannot access the piece live. Johnston argues that extreme durational works should be reclassified to be lasting (durlating) until the second, detached, audience access it, "an expanded understanding of what constitutes a performance event."<sup>210</sup> The documental transmission of myth merges with this new definition.

However, in order for the mythology surrounding this work (and other similar scenarios)

---

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

to function and become an operational element of its archival legacy, a number of conditions are required. Firstly, Abramović and Ulay had already established themselves as performance artists internationally, and their intentions and absence in carrying out the epic work had been clearly noted by artist peers and press. Secondly, despite being performed without an audience the work, was witnessed and evidenced by two performance critics. This situation allowed for the aura of a mythic quest to remain whilst ensuring Abramović and Ulay's work was reported and published within the art world. A calculated balance was struck between the availability of records and a narrative disseminated. In a similar move in the contemporary context Sehgal denies all photography and video at his performances, but holds press previews in advance.

### 2.3.7 Repetition

A number of practitioners and researchers have approached re-performance as a strategy for the preservation of performance works through embodied methods. One example which demonstrates this approach is the Bristol Research project *Performing Documents*. Run by Professor Simon Jones from Bristol University, this AHRC funded study set out to “research and facilitate a further significant advance in the understanding, engagement with and use of these archival materials and performance archives more widely.”<sup>211</sup>

*Performing Documents* was particularly unique in comparison to earlier academic studies in this area, in its focus on practice led research as a central area of knowledge production. Through three workshops (themed individually as *Remake*, *Redux* and *Replace*) the study's contributors and partners tested their response and relationship to archived performance remains. Strategies such as re-performance, creating narratives between documents, and how to piece together histories were tested. Alongside these practice led workshops the exhibition *Version Control* took place at the Arnolfini

---

<sup>211</sup> “University of Exeter,” accessed October 19, 2014, <http://humanities.exeter.ac.uk/english/research/projects/performingdocuments/>.

(February – April 2013), which showed the work of artists and organisations thinking through the documents of performance (and strategies of appropriation) in works which tested the balance between document and art object.

This particular approach allows work to remain through its embodiment and the reception of both performers and audience. Clearly, each re-performance is itself a new work, yet the knowledge of the original is held within that: transforming and restated each time in an evolving process.

This method of creating a memorial through performance is in particular exemplified by the Siobhan Davies Dance piece *Table of Contents* (2014).<sup>212</sup> Davies lead choreographing the work alongside established contributors Andrea Buckley, Helka Kaski, Rachel Krische, Charlie Morrissey and Matthias Sperling, performing for up to seven hours a day in a tour of three venues (all gallery spaces rather than theatre or dance specific locations). Prior to the shows Davies referred to the work as being specifically about the archive, “and how dance as an artform can be captured and communicated.”<sup>213</sup> The work was centred around the motif of a large table (the only significant prop or physical staging within the white wall gallery space) which the performers intermittently returned to in order to discuss and plan the next stages of the work.

Through a process of conversation and collaboration between the performers the work was formed anew each day, with combinations and juxtapositions of choreography which referenced and remembered what had gone before. The performers described the process of planning and creating this work as akin to compost; previous experience and actions feeding into a new yet connected work. This included their own embodied memories alongside viewing documents via the Siobhan Davies Dance web archive –

---

<sup>212</sup> Work viewed 28.01.14 Tramway, Glasgow. Before the show began a question and answer session took place with the cast, elements of which are referred to within this text.

<sup>213</sup> Siobhan Davies, “Siobhan Davies: Can Dance Be Archived?,” *The Guardian*, sec. Culture professionals network, accessed July 9, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/culture-professionals-network/culture-professionals-blog/2014/jan/09/siobhan-davies-dance-archives-ica>.

such as scratch footage of selected works in rehearsal. These materials are all filtered into a new work which reformed them as a present work also archiving through repetition those earlier pieces.

This process reflects the nature of dance as an embodied practice (akin to that described by Taylor), and a living archive such as this mirrors the state of flux and development the live form and its works are perpetually in. Through the repetition and embodiment of the performance the cast were able to 'know' the archive in a way quite removed from other art forms; as an animate, physical presence within their own bodies.

The dancers returning to the table after each stage of the work acted as a refrain where the archival elements could be discussed and planned to be reinterpreted once again. The large wooden table acted as a palimpsest presence within the piece. The dancers planned their future actions - sketching positions and movement in chalk, yet rather than remaining as a document of that process, each time they returned the plan was wiped. However, the presence remained through the building layers of chalk dust and faint lines, an impression still visible that something had gone before. This approach demonstrates the embodied process acting alongside, yet in excess of the fixed and immovable object.

*For Now* was an element of the piece which particularly reflected on the process of remembrance and re-performance through embodied practices. Performed by Sperling, the piece functioned through a framework where the statement "for now..." was made before the dancer performed a series of short movements stating the gestures he was recreating were "by [name of artist], from [name of dance piece]". This process allowed Sperling to 'quote' earlier works through an embodied recollection and physical knowledge of the repertoire. The fleeting glimpses of past works and other practitioners were transformed and transposed as part of *Table of Contents*.





Figure 21: Siobhan Davies Dance, *Table of Contents*, ICA London (2014)



Figure 22: Siobhan Davies Dance, *Table of Contents*, ICA London (2014)



Within the piece Kaski had spent time viewing the online archive, and one particular element of her performance recreated this process. Her movements began slowly and uncertainly, repeating and with that shifting into a more assertive and exaggerated gesture. The building sense of embodiment and the dancer coming to own the movement as her own was made tangible throughout the short piece.

Beyond performative practices repetition also features in contemporary practice as a method of remembrance through the appropriation of images in the way that Warburg recognised aesthetic poses as refrains running throughout visual history. We might observe an archival presence through the visual literacy and inheritance in this form in cultures globally. As Warburg identified the gestures of trauma to the Renaissance and beyond, it also holds an echo of Derrida's statement on the inscription and the associated paternalist structure of the archive.

### **2.3.8 Notes on the Taxonomy**

In this creation of a framework for the analysis of performance archives I applied the research into the archives of others and my own practice, testing the accuracy of my categories and functional descriptions. In categorising my own practice led research through the use of the taxonomy I have been able to further identify the position of archiving as a creative strategy within my own practice, and also recognise its position and function within a wider context of practice based archives. The structure and descriptions also lead on to testing the limitations of these categories through practice led investigations.

## 2.4 Binding

### **Binding**<sup>214</sup>

**Performance:** *First Time, Last Time*, Ludus Dance, Lancaster. December 2012.

Curated by LEAP.

**Archive:** Props from performance work (textile, found object, DVD), text from both before and after the work performed. Continued experimentation using these remains.

Following research within performance archives and toward an emergent taxonomy, practice led research was undertaken examining the remains left by a performance at different stages within its life cycle. In the instance of this piece (*Binding*), a performance has taken place for a live audience. However, the archival work begins with a secondary series of actions undertaken without an audience present. This performance is acted upon through the remains of the first. Unwinding strips of fabric, which in the original made up the labour of the work, encasing the objects within layers of cloth.

This further phase of interaction with the archival remains of an original performance, intertwines a series of actions, independent acts that are nonetheless connected through the artefacts involved. The two became inextricably linked within the archive. An original action is repeated, yet reversed, and in this repetition the destruction of the artefact is assured. The remains now exist as both before and after the two actions had been undertaken. Physically returned to an original state, they are transformed through their involvement in the performative actions, and shift in status toward the artefact of a live work, within the archive.

The original performance produced a set of traces and documents to review and re-examine. These objects correspond to various elements of the taxonomy, and offered the opportunity to further interrogate their function both in relation to the live work, and

---

<sup>214</sup> [hannahelizabethhallan.info/binding](http://hannahelizabethhallan.info/binding)

as elements of the performance archive. The inquiry began with a focus upon the artefacts as a source for a secondary work, before a cyclical return to the source of that initial performance.

*There is an original.*

*A performance.*

*Existing in one particular moment, for one particular audience.*

*Yet, remaining beyond this.*

*The accidental, incidental traces of an action.*

*What has passed marked out in taught string and cotton weft.*

A process of ‘unmaking’ that original performance began, a mimicking, re-performance of sorts. The same slow, meditative series of movements were employed, although now reversing that outcome. This repetition imprinted in the physical relationship to the remains – the performer’s embodied memory of a work. A repetition which speaks of Taylor’s repertoire in the action repeated yet transformed, rather than attempting an exacting repetition. The piece is renewed through an embodied re-envisioning which allows for adaption and difference.

This second performance then itself acts as an archival action, re-enforcing a memory of the event (for the performer) outside of the physical archival structure, and into that of repertoire and repetition. This also raises the question of if this secondary work can be documented or discussed in isolation – if it can exist apart from the original it attempts to re-enact and undo.

*Replicate, test, break.*

*Reaching toward,*

*A limit of the form.*

*There are layers here.  
Pulling at each, toward an origin.  
They continue.  
Below the last another, underneath that surface.*

The secondary performance was documented through digital photographs, an instinctive impulse of the artist-performer to prove that event took place. The images that exist here, in this archive, as a marker of those passed actions. Photography (particularly digital) with its ease of replication and sense of authority offers an obvious choice for the creation of records. Potentially rendering events exactly as they were, as they happened. The promise of the photograph is to capture that fleeting gesture exactly and knowingly for future access.

In the case of the work included here, the documentation demonstrates that the relationship between that action and its photographic archive is rarely so straightforward. The series of images do little to demonstrate or illustrate the significance of the unbinding action in relation to the previous performance. Neither do the photographs communicate the slow paced physicality of the action and its enduring progression toward an end point, a final state. The images merely depict the remains of the performance – the artefacts – at various stages of transformation throughout the process.

*They are stilted.  
An attempt to capture without action or self.  
The performer an absence.*



Document 1: *Binding* photographic documentation



Document 2: *Binding* photographic documentation

These images do not depict the work, instead demonstrating only the material shift over time, the effect of the performance on its artefacts. Whilst not risking a replacement of the performance work through a series of comprehensive and detailed images, the photographs neither succeed in representing the process of work in a manner recognisable to the experience of its performer for inclusion within the archive.

*Between two gestures,  
An archive existing in this liminal state,  
Beyond the two.*

The work is better contextualised through a pre-existing text, rather than the images which attempt to capture the transformation of the objects. This writing (pictured) existed before either incarnation of the performance; and so in effect is the original of which the live actions attempt to replicate and re-interpret.

This text is part of the process of creating the work, which remains in spite of the temporality of the live pieces it precedes. Created without the intention of later representing the work within an archive, yet doing so, it acts as a trace object. Unlike the AV recording, we understand this text to be of the work, yet not the piece itself. The text cannot replicate the live, and makes no claim to do so. However, it may both precede and endure beyond it, marking a presence within the archive.

The space is still, dimly lit. The light focuses upon a small chair, wooden with chipped varnish and a padded seat that is bleached and frayed. A low coffee table is in front, on it is placed a row of objects. These are used, worn, but cared for. Only remarkable shared within this context. Lying to one side of the table, in a heap on the floor, is a large pile of fabric. Torn strips fraying, spilling thread.

A blue grey glow swells. A small television flickers from static into domestic views. Steady, but for glitches and imperfections in the image quality: empty rooms linger on the screen. Nothing happens now, something has.

The performer walks into the room and sits in the chair, drawing it to the table. Intently staring at one of the objects, it is held, considered for a moment. Then the performer reaches down for a strip of fabric and begins to wrap the object, slowly building layers. This process is delicately undertaken over a long period. A thickening fabric builds, obscuring the form. Edges blur and becoming indecipherable, the object loses identity and meaning. It is placed back upon the table.

The binding is repeated, each object is lost.

Images continue to flicker across the television screen. They are repeating now, the same unknowable spaces.

The performer leaves. Everything is left as was: now the objects are obscured, the memories less clear.

## 2.5 Performance Documentation Exhibition

### **Performance Documentation**<sup>215</sup>

**Action:** working as a documentation artist for the *Performance Documentation* exhibition held at East Street Arts, Warren Street, London in August 2013. Curated by Stephanie Dickinson.

**Archive:** A series of instant photographs and handwritten texts mounted onto A5 card. Notebook with extended original texts.

A series of works were created through documenting an evening of live work carried out by other performers. The resulting texts and photographs remained in the space, as a relic of what had previously taken place, for the duration of the month long exhibition following these opening performances. They explore how far a document is tied to the original event, and at what point it becomes a detached piece of work, independent from this source.

The documents were created using an instant film camera and marker pen on card. This approach represents a rough and immediate response to the environment and task. The pieces were made in the 'real time' of the performances, themselves located within a temporal process of documenting the events and experience. This sense of immediacy is present in the documents produced. They function as a remainder, rooted in that moment of witnessing and re-interpretation, rather than a considered response created at some later point from memory and prompts. The process of recording became itself a performative gesture. The nature of spectacle inherent in the documentary process was made clear through this exercise, and in contrast consider the potential of forms which bypass this intervention in their process.

*A hefty camera  
with its loud grinding mechanism*

---

<sup>215</sup> [hannahelizabethhallan.info/performance-documentation](http://hannahelizabethhallan.info/performance-documentation)



*pulling through the paper  
writing propped against a pillar  
attempting to remain in the background.*

*The in/visibility of the photographer.*

The situation of the documentary process as central to the event and exhibition lead to this process at times seeming to overwhelm the performances themselves. Yet, it could equally be argued that this documentation was the subject of the project, and as such was reflected as a central element in the live showings of the work.

My own documentation focused on each of performances, but was drawn more to the experience of being in the space and the assigned role of witness. Despite the experimental approach some fairly formal qualities remained; as assigned documenter of the work I felt compelled to watch and record aspects of each performance. This was despite my clearly stated aim (and given task) of being free to make whatever seemed appropriate. A need to be consistent even in this experimental mode seems to point towards an element of the 'archive fever' that pushes towards the comprehensive review.

*I photograph the feet of audience and performers.  
People walking past the gallery's windows, staring in. Notes from overheard  
conversations. (Some are invented). A body of work which gives an entirely subjective  
account of my experience in that space.*

The images and texts created whilst witnessing the event act as both document and trace. Intended as documentation they demonstrate aspects of that quality - consciously created to record the performance environment at that time. However, in their quality of 'having been there' at the moment of something happening, and crucially, the personal and cryptic nature of the recordings they also perform a function as trace: an object from that moment that is ultimately untranslatable in the present moment.



Document 4: *Performance Documentation* exhibition instant photos



Document 5: *Performance Documentation* exhibition instant photos



Document 6: *Performance Documentation* exhibition instant photos



A slow and unremarkable march.

Document 7: *Performance Documentation* exhibition instant photo and text

## 2.6 Dimanche Rouge Festival: archivist in residence

### Dimanche Rouge Festival 2013: archivist in residence project<sup>216</sup>

**Various locations and performers:** Tallinn (Estonia), Helsinki and Espoo (Finland).

**Archive:** Instant photographs, black and white 35mm photographs, colour 35mm photographs, notebook, handwritten index cards.

A self-directed body of work, acting as 'archivist in residence' for the Dimanche Rouge 2013 festival held across Finland, Estonia and France. The nature of this work allowed me to explore in more detail how I might construct 'alternative' archives of other artists' performances. This sense of freedom was partly aided by the curators having already organised a large team of digital documenters responsible for making more standard recordings via stills and video.

*An individual account of the witnessing of the work, rooted in that particular moment.*

The photographs represent a series of encounters between photographer, performer and space. The resulting output would tend towards the document by definition of being a conscious recording of an event, however I aimed to approach the making and contextualisation of the process instead as trace.

*Here, but not now. Viewing a moment of light and chemical reactions.*

*The silhouette here, on the page, barely registers at the moment of witnessing yet later is the significant gesture, picked from multiple possibilities.*

All the images are shot on film. The removal and delay of this medium seems important in making images that might exist in the moment, revealed and deciphered much later when developed. The endless multiplicity is not an option (for reasons of practicality and finance), and this limitation results in a deliberate choice to record any given moment, a

---

<sup>216</sup> [hannahelizabethhallan.info/dimanche-rouge-festival](http://hannahelizabethhallan.info/dimanche-rouge-festival)

sensitivity and selectivity to what seems important. Making choices, as an archivist might, of which moments to dispose of and which to preserve.

The approach towards the framing of the images and what elements of the performances were included also attempted to shift the usual photographic documentary quality into trace. The texts made during and after the performances work in tandem with these images: at times working together or against one another. The content is rooted in the moment of witnessing rather than attempting to describe it.

*Imperfections: blur, focus, scratches.*

Errors point to the physicality of the remains, that they are deliberately fabricated objects. In avoiding a perfect digital rendering the viewer is reminded of the artifice of these documents, they are viewing an object, an interpretation not the performance itself. These aspects also reflect back upon the process of their making; the conscious effort of production, the choice in that moment, in a way the continual shooting of the digital or video recordings might not.

*The air hums with focus multiplied.*

*Red lights pinprick constant digital noise.*

*A copy rendered immediate in the display.*

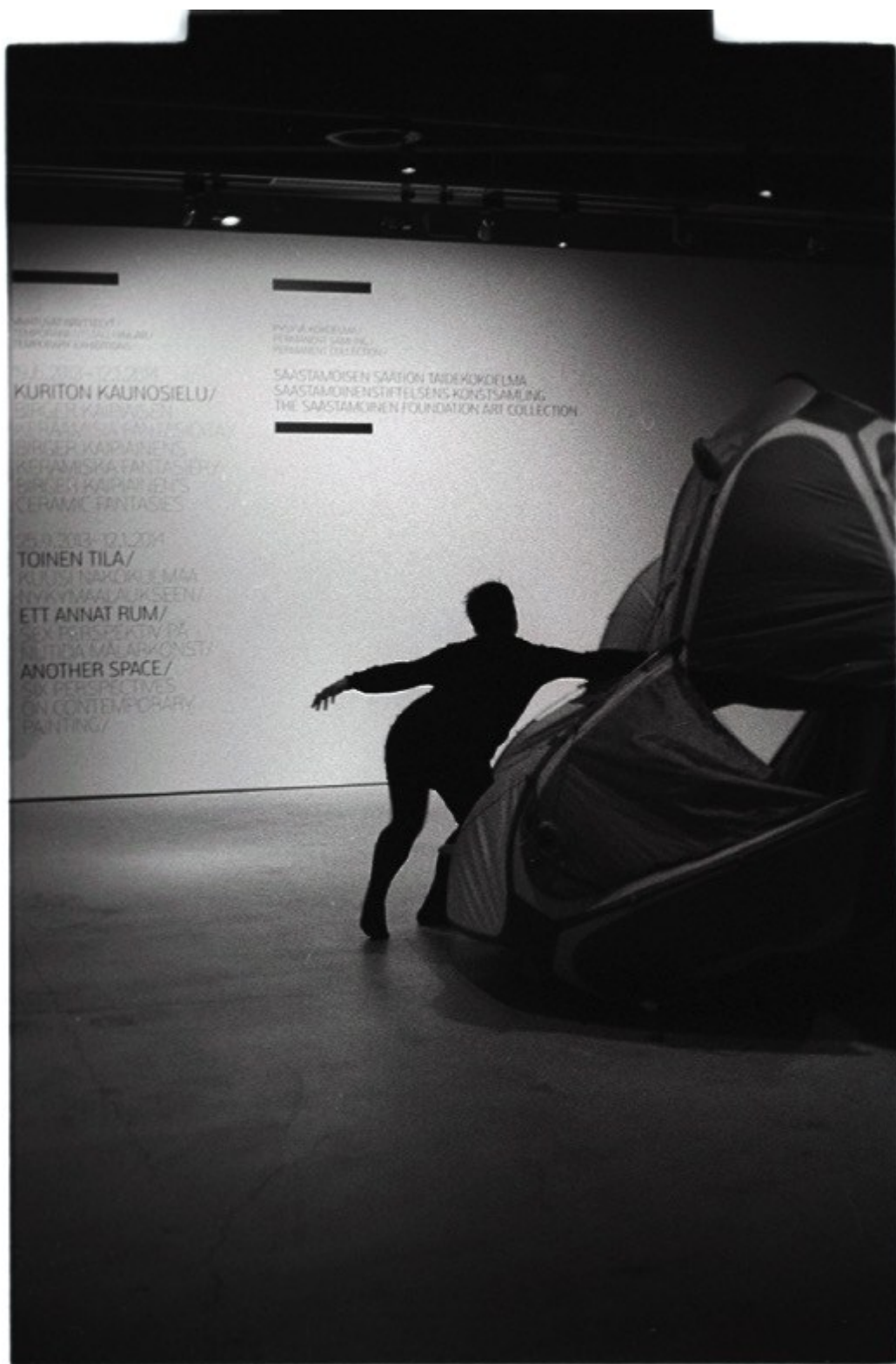
*I watch through a fogged viewfinder, vignetted in slow creeping mould.*

*The louder whir and pull of the mechanism is marked.*

*Section analysing texts in general (method of making etc)*

As a collection of documents made with the express intention of creating an archive, the collection of images and texts is perhaps more experimental than most, an account not concerned with recording the usual precise details. They aim towards a candid, yet abstracted nature. Self-conscious of this desire and task to record the passing work.



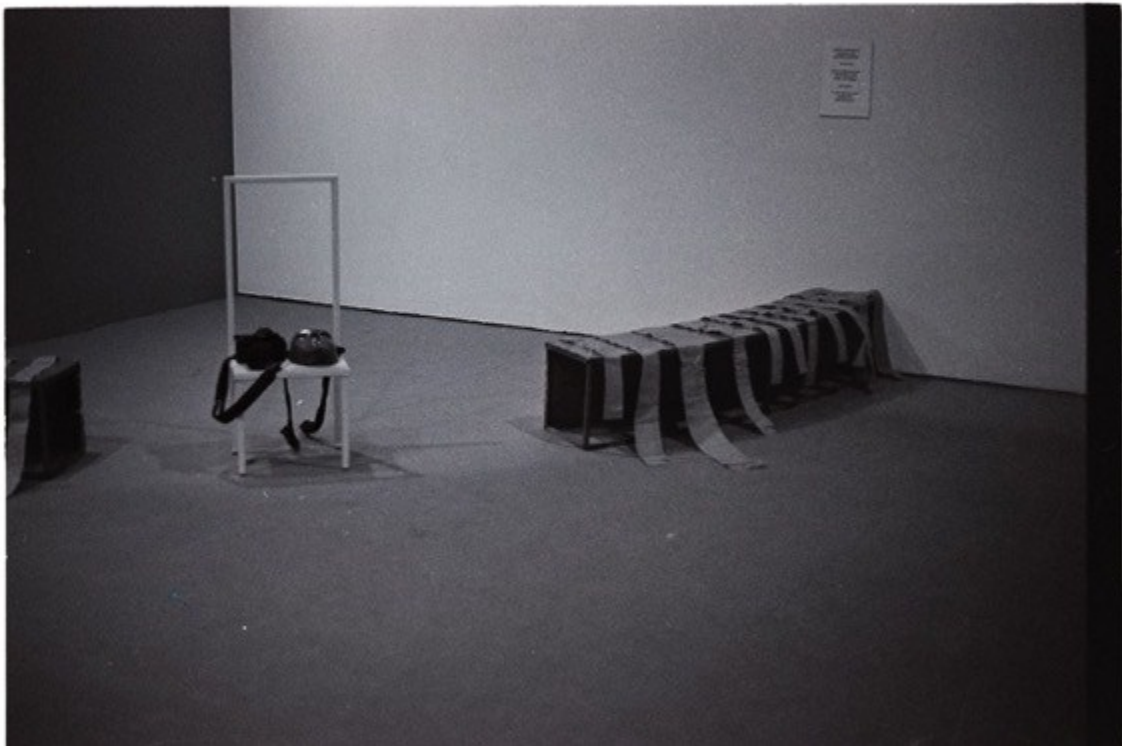


Document 8: Performance documentation, 35mm film. Artist - Olivia Wiederkehr, *Spatial Practice of Everyday Use*





Document 9: Performance documentation, 35mm film. Artist - Rooms, *Ritual #1: Counting Birds*



Document 10: Performance documentation, 35mm film. Artist - Francesca Fini, *The Playhub*

## 2.7 A Song

### **A Song**<sup>217</sup>

**Practice:** Interdisciplinary project, 2012-2013, paper works (exhibited), performance, poetry.

**Archive:** 7 sheets of A4 paper with holes, digital video, and printed texts.

A series of works based around the deconstruction and reinterpretation of a forgotten Lancashire folk song (no other contemporary recording or interpretation could be found). The song had been lost as a living cultural element, these descriptions of it act as markers of that which has passed. The resulting pieces of work interpret the trace remaining of an initial performance (its aide, the notation), before turning it into once more the trace remains of a previous gesture. As signs alone the elements of musical notation and lyrics can be further encoded or translated to a breaking point of comprehension, where the signifier became abstracted from the object.

Using the folk song tradition opens the dialogue between oral history and the archival record. The written remnants resemble little of the inherited cultural process of the development and performance of this music, yet it is all that remains. The knowledge and experience of the original performance has been lost, with the document comes a new kind of knowledge: without a context. Any attempt to describe the essence of a song/artefact reveals little. The implication that outside of that original temporal context nothing can be satisfactorily communicated or decoded.

The interpretation turns to a way of demonstrating absence in a literal way. The photocopied sheet music is layered over a thick paper, and each note is punctured with a pinprick. Seven sheets are separated and framed. The series has a subtle presence, where the viewer must come close, lean in and peer at these small voids running through the pages, their origin is not clear, perhaps a pianola roll or relic of early

---

<sup>217</sup> [hannahelizabethallan.info/a-song](http://hannahelizabethallan.info/a-song)

computing. Later, the inclusion of the title page gives some degree of context through which to read these strange absences, the unfamiliar title, *What Ails Thee My Son Robin?* and the sparse instructions, *A song for piano and voice*.

The work's most successful action is in describing an absence. The passing of time, the originary moment, context and action are all notable in their lack within these initial pieces featuring the faint traces of the original score in the pinpricked papers. The traces point to what has gone and in so doing create a presence for that absence within the archive.

*It was lost, this trace. A history existing as barest fragments.*

*Black dots and twisted vowels that cannot be deciphered, needing a rolling dialogue between tongue and breath to bear. The inheritance forgotten, but for these - few - untranslated texts. Language slips and falls away. The melody deadens and fades.*

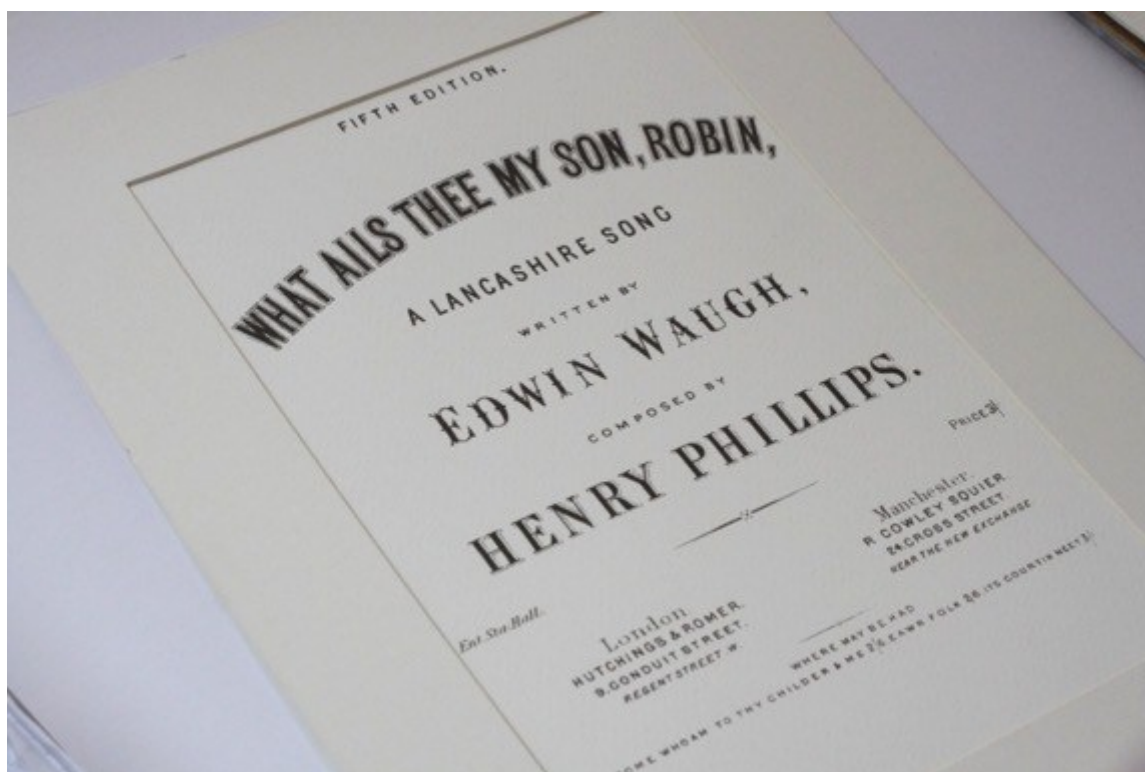
Practice shifts these faint, disintegrating traces from document to embodiment. An interpretation of the archival object that emphasises the gaps and distance between the intent of the origin to the ways we can understand it now, as document, as trace, as the basis of practice. All filtered through the selective lens of the archivist. The series illustrates the lack inherent within this document, and by extension all archival traces.

*The song, here, it exists only as print. Not even that. The barest existence and trail in the digital.*

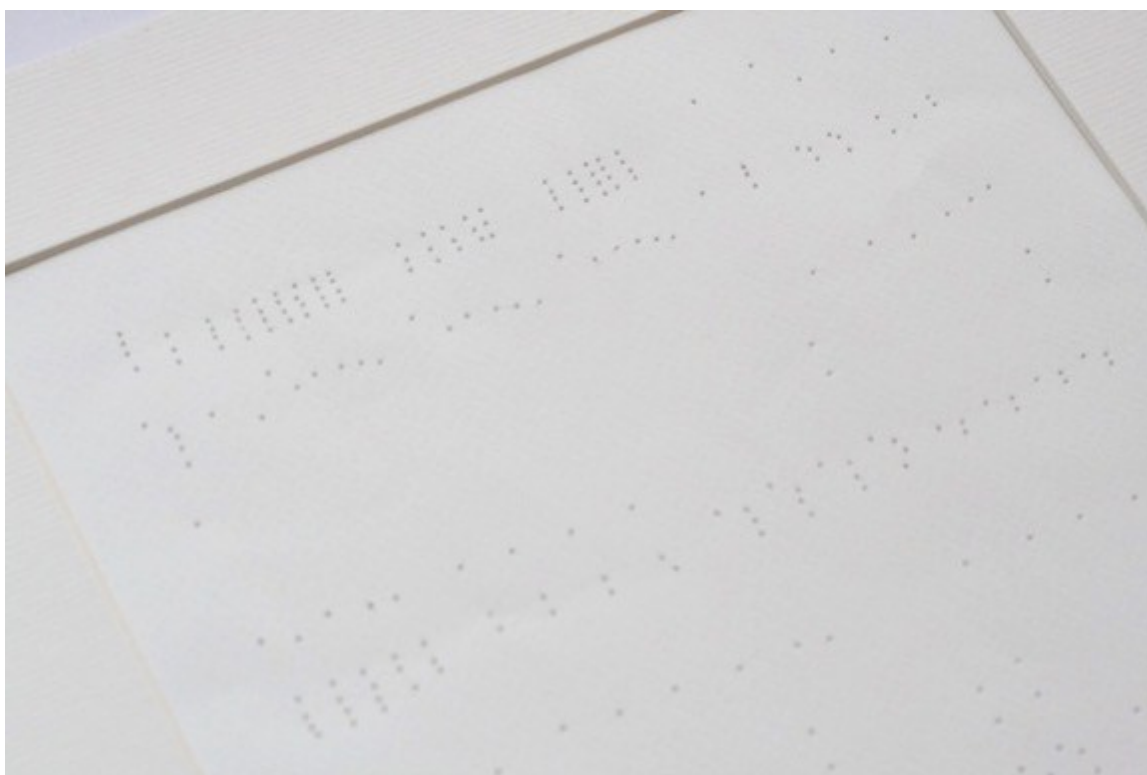
*My first act is to make this physical.*

*Prints from the record.*

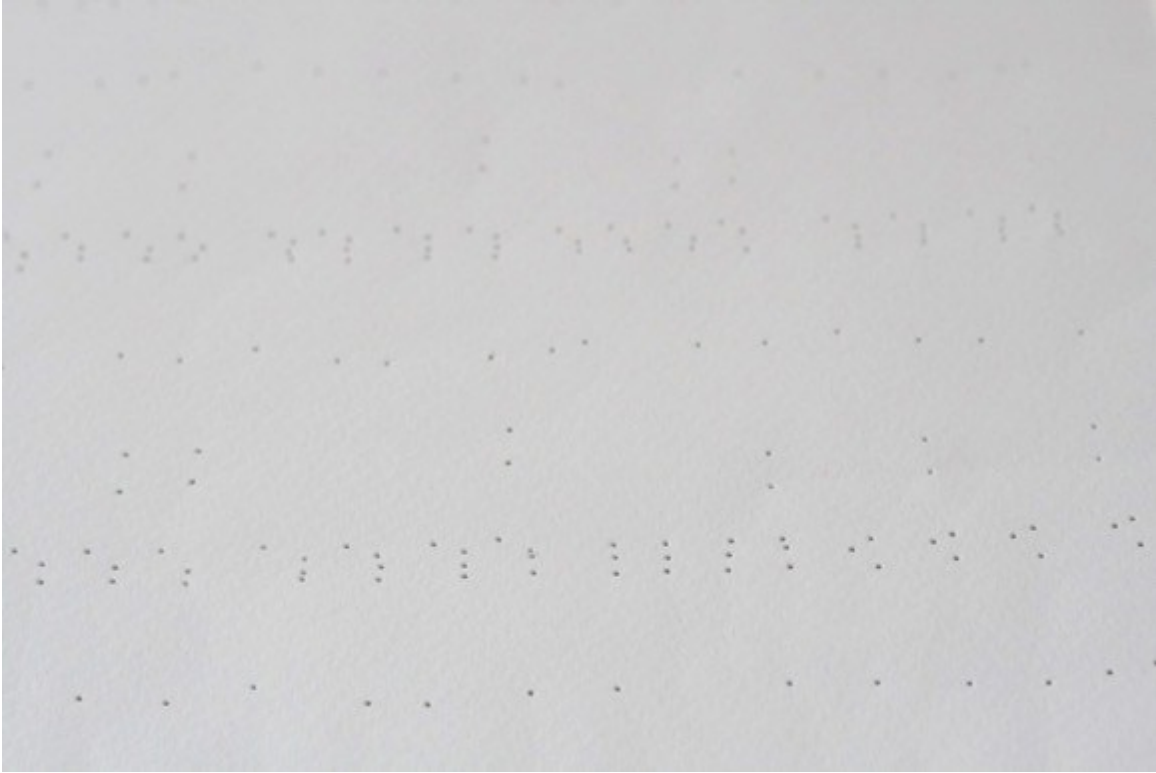
*Softly blurred squared edges.*



Document 11: A Song, exhibited work



Document 12: A Song, exhibited work



Document 13: A Song, exhibited work

The piece can no longer convey the intended information for re-performance, but it can, on close scrutiny begin to demonstrate a series of absences and with them the nature of the trace. Pointing to what was there, now passed, now untranslatable yet somehow still here, still pointing to what had been present.

*The work, here, is absented again.*

*Softly mouthing words, unfamiliar incantations, the dialect and voice rooted here, yet now displaced. Trying, feeling through to re-activate these muted phrases. Leaning through the notes, interpreting for now.*

*What ails thee, my son Robin?  
My heart is sore for thee  
Thi cheeks are groin' thinner,*

*An' th' leet has laft thi e'e',  
thaew trails abeawt so lonesome,  
An' looks so pale at morn; god bless tho lad aw'm soory  
To see tho so forlorn*

*I return to the original document.*

The trace turned back into a gesture, an uncertain process, being dislocated from that language and its signifiers. Yet, this document is also a troubled one. A physical object here again, it has undergone a transformative process, demonstrating that urge to bring something to life, make it real, give it form.

Attempts to decode and translate this object demonstrate that it points to a lost knowledge, and a passed moment. Ricoeur cited this quality as intratemporality - literally, existing between temporalities - an item in the present that is rooted in the past yet tells us little, other than its presence. The trace and the document both perform across times: the document is a deliberate attempt to communicate passed events to the future, whereas the trace is incidental, created for a purpose other than history telling, now potentially enigmatic and elusive in a way documents tend not to be.

This text exists as a later interpretation of the original document; a poem performed alongside sung extracts from the original score. This performance was situated in a particular location and time - an old barn, isolated, in the West Yorkshire hills. A text notation behaves as a trace of that moment, pauses and breathing spaces indicated for dramatic effect. The process of interrogating one trace leads, eventually, to another trace proper. Again, it acts as an aide to performance. The trace could be re-performed but there is ultimately an original gesture now lost from which this trace object arose.

Emptiness above heavy lungs  
A yearning with space between  
My heart is sore for thee.

Through choked and strangling mass  
Twisting thing, part earth part  
Visible, awter't, clings to stone.

Resisting sight, that it knows.  
That leet, left thee eeyes.

Old here, yet none.  
No one to watch, as structures  
Fade, into hillsides.

Tumbling stones, boulders chip fragments  
into whispers down cloof,  
Through browning tongues, decaying sweetness  
fills that humid cloying air.

### 3.0 False Records and Uncertain Narratives

The previous chapter reviewed the performance archive and its component elements, before using these tools to investigate how performance might exist within the archive - both institutionally and within my own practice. This demonstrated the complex nature of these archives with multiple types of document, their relationship to the original work and each other. Moving on from considering the mythology surrounding works seen by few audience members (as was described through the example of Abramović and Ulay's *The Lovers*), we can consider how the archive might exist for works which did not take place at all, and in doing so question what the consequences might be for that specific documentation, and the archive itself.

This element of the enquiry begins again within the discipline of performance looking to the practice of Hayley Newman and Mel Brimfield, both of whom create work which documents actions which did not take place (or at least, not in the way they claim) to make a constructed performance archive. Following this, the study shifts to discuss the work of artists who construct false records and archives in order to convey a narrative which demonstrates a truth counter to the official archive through assumed characters who narrate differing experiences. When we consider the work of the Atlas Group and Ilya Kabakov we are presented with protagonists who create archives within contested spaces and against the strict socio political boundaries imposed upon them (according to their reading). In these situations the fictional narrative offers an alternative, first person account of experiencing the space and events, distinct from the prevailing versions.

These faked archives have the potential to question the authenticity of documents which make up the archive, and the nature of the witness – a potential which might lead us to reconsider the authority of the archival and the reliability of testimony. Conversely, these examples might also lead us to question the need for the originary event itself. If we can create meaning and significance in these falsified archival remains, then do we need the history to have even taken place?



The binary opposition to what we might consider truthful and fictitious works also leads to a questioning of how we read both artworks and the archive. We might expect the archive and archivist to be searching for only documents which tell a 'truth', however the archivist is only concerned with the provenance of a record (that it is established to be from a certain time/author) rather than focused on the content of the document itself, or what it purports to record. Equally, works which claim to document a temporal action may be included in both the archive and gallery without verification of having taken place as described. How truth and fiction interplay within the archive proper, is played out through the practice of the artists discussed, and the alternative space of the gallery and collection is also tested as a space for fictional documents and archives to be located.

### **3.1 Performances That Didn't Happen**

In moving from the work of the previous chapter, the focus remains upon performance practices and their existence within the archive. However, that focus shifts to consider if it is necessary for the original event – that live gesture – to have taken place for the documentation to function as remains within the archive. Through focusing on the work of Hayley Newman and Mel Brimfield this section of the thesis questions the nature of performance documentation as an inherently uncertain form, open to manipulation, and asks how work such as this affects our viewing of performance archives.

We might consider how these 'faked' archives sit alongside genuine archival remains (as featured within the previous chapter), and the effect of each upon the other. Does this manner of false documentation undermine the genuine, or simply offer a critique of documentation practices?

### 3.1.1 Hayley Newman - Invented Accounts

Hayley Newman, having already established a practice as an artist working in the field of performance, went on to create faked documents of actions with the *Connotations* series.<sup>218</sup> *Connotations* exist within the real context of Newman's practice as a performance artist, however, these pieces were produced through a different process - setting up one moment which was photographed to create a fabricated record of a performance which never took place. In this work Newman specifically aims to investigate how text and photographs combine within the performance archive and how they might suggest the presence of a work which never existed.

*Connotations* adds to the debate on the nature of truth and fiction, both within the performance archive, and in a wider sense, the notion of archives as a construct made out of documentary forms. The use of text explanation twinned with photographic document genre, and the aesthetics and surrounding discussion of the work has reflected this context. However, the work can also bring to the fore a consideration of the nature of truth and fiction within artistic practice in a wider sense: truthfulness is expected of these documentary practices, yet not of other modes of working which nonetheless employ elements of temporal process in their making (i.e. the painter, the sculptor). The way in which these works are situated, linked as they are to the archive, affects our reading of them. This connection results in an expectation of authenticity unique to this type of practice which is mainly framed and authenticated through a series of documents and statements.

---

<sup>218</sup> *Connotations* from 1998 was followed by the later series *Connotations II* made in 2002. This study focuses on the first iteration only, as this connects directly to the issue of creating archival performances in the manner of earlier influential performers and questioning their methods of documentation, which is the focus of Newman's commentary in her own thesis. The later series tends towards showing a scene only, and features collaged text over the image itself, so in form is notably different from the earlier works.



Figure 23: Hayley Newman, *Connotations* (1998)

*Caption: Crying Glasses (An Aid to Melancholia) 1995*

*Over a year I wore the crying glasses while travelling on public transport in all the cities I visited. The glasses functioned using a pump system which, hidden inside my jacket, allowed me to pump water up out of the glasses and produce a trickle of tears down my cheeks. The glasses were conceived as a tool to enable the representation of feelings in public spaces. Over the months of wearing the glasses they became an external mechanism which enabled the manifestation of internal and unidentifiable emotions.*

The first *Connotations* series was made over the course of a week in 1998 (with the aid of photographer Casey Orr), despite the texts accompanying the work the pieces are credited as being produced throughout the 1990s. An impression enforced by the type of film used shifting the aesthetics of each image, accompanying a multitude of clothing and hairstyle changes by Newman herself. Each of the photographs is accompanied by

a text, giving the title and a brief description of the action apparently undertaken. When exhibited<sup>219</sup> these works are accompanied by an additional statement which explains the falsified nature of the work and its production. However this is often not noted, even by some of those engaged in critical dialogue around Newman's practice, this is particularly prevalent in online commentary where images are re-appropriated without the surrounding contextual information.

Newman has cited 1970s performance work as being a key influence in the making of the *Connotations* series. This resulted in a body of work which mirrored and also worked against the sparse documentation practices of that time, which were often reliant upon anecdote and mythology to sustain a work. This reference is clear within the work to those familiar with work from the time (ie, Chris Burden, Stuart Brisley), and is also made explicit by Newman herself in commentary around the work. (For example, Newman's PhD thesis features the series in a section subtitled "Performance explanations based on written descriptions from the 1970s").<sup>220</sup> However, many viewers of the work (particularly in the context of the work in the Beck's Futures group show) would not be aware of this nod to previous works and practitioners, and would therefore be more likely to read the work as a straightforward documentation of performative practice.

Newman appropriates the straightforward and brief linguistic style of these early conventions - which arose from the Fluxus movement and their instructional text scores intended to provoke repeated versions of the gesture. As Ricoeur identified a process which moves from the trace to the archive, Newman has identified the moves made within performance practice as "following the rubric; plan – performance – document"<sup>221</sup> and that the 1970s style of conceptual performance works particularly suited a style of

---

<sup>219</sup> Commissioned by Hull Time Based Arts *Connotations – Performance Images 1994-98* (original title) was shown at Beverly Art Gallery October 1998. A later showing as *Connotations* appeared as part of the Becks Futures 2000 at various venues including the ICA, London in Spring 2000.

<sup>220</sup> Hayley Newman, "Locating Performance : Textual Identity and the Performative / Hayley Newman." (Leeds: University of Leeds, 2001), vol 2, 34.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid, 30 Vol. 1.

clipped, sparse texts. In this way, Newman identifies the text as an automatic response to making and documenting practice, much like the photograph.

The piece *B(in)* included in *Connotations* provides a further link to the influence of this earlier work, through directly responding to Chris Burden's *Deadman* performance and documentation. In the piece, Burden lay at the wheels of a parked car in the road, covered in canvas sacking, with only two flares next to him alerting the oncoming motorists (eventually being removed and arrested by police) - whilst Newman's more playful interpretation proposed waiting in a bin bag with other rubbish, until they came to be collected and then running away. This tribute extends the narrative of Burden's earlier work and builds an additional layer of meaning. By association we also question the truthfulness of the original: there is only the image, text and surrounding mythology to authenticate it (just as Newman has provided).

Despite Newman's disclaimer that the contents of the work were fictional and staged, the authenticating effect of photo-plus-text has resulted in a general sense of confusion, and contradictory accounts over which (if any) of the performances detailed in *Connotations* took place. Newman makes reference to the fact that a number of reviews had been written as though the performances took place, and that having not read the contextualising statement some of the audience also left the work with that impression.<sup>222</sup> This eventuality had been factored into the work, so that there might be multiple and conflicting narratives attached to the work.

Although Newman did not lie to her audience, she did construct a situation that might foster a certain amount of uncertainty, and set up the supposedly archival documents to be misread. The disclaimer statement might be overlooked, or not quoted by reviewers - particularly in blogs and online reviews a number of writers perpetuate the impression that the works took place by writing about them in this manner. With so many contradictory reports in circulation from multiple sources, the later viewer accessing the

---

<sup>222</sup> Ibid, 34–35 Vol. 1.

work through its remains, cannot pin down the exact nature of the work, perhaps only able to do so having reached Newman's own commentary of the work in her thesis.

The texts which accompany Newman's photographs are present as a pair in her thesis and exhibitions, indicating the clear link, and that the descriptions are an intrinsic element of the work. The separate statement which explains the duplicitous nature of the exercise, is again present throughout Newman's iteration of the work; however, this is less clearly an element of the series, on the boundary between artwork and the expected commentary of the artist, curator and or institution. In this way the statement operates on a level similar to the archival catalogue, giving commentary on the provenance of the works.

The strong focus on the relationship between text and the image is somewhat diluted when Newman's practice is discussed through media and print. In the exhibition format the symbiotic connection is clear, yet, in the more archival settings of publication and the online space this relationship is easily either ignored or forgotten. Even when the author is aware of the narrative behind *Connotations*, they often ad lib or create their own description of the project without displaying Newman's (both in terms of the individual pieces, and the overall statement). In terms of reporting on the work it is important to note that Newman's own presentation hints towards these texts as an integral element of the body which makes up *Connotations*. Newman herself has described this importance of her text to the work,

"As with the accounts in *Connotations* the text panel for *Bubble* is an integral part of the artwork and attributes the authorship of such information to the artist rather than to the anonymity of the institution."<sup>223</sup>

Thinking through the interdependent relationship between photography and text both in her own practice, and that of earlier performance works, Newman describes the

---

<sup>223</sup> Ibid, 52 Vol. 1.

connections as one that within each element “sustains the others’ narrative”.<sup>224</sup> Newman describes the 1970s work which influenced the series as being open to text narration, with the focus on simple, repetitive and mundane tasks. In this way, the description could act as an easily created form of documentation after the act, and became a ubiquitous element of the archive along with the photograph. In establishing this symbiotic relationship between the two documentary mediums, this earlier work established the authenticating pattern of using the two in parallel. With each validating the other, an aporia opens, allowing for an unmade work to exist between the combined efforts of these forms. This happens, as Newman describes, since “any readings of the text and image must be made through the work’s absence.”<sup>225</sup>

In a sense any work which is documented in the performance archive may or may not have taken place. For the viewer who was not present amongst the handful that witnessed a Burden performance directly, there is nothing to separate the experience of viewing the remains of his work, to that of viewing Newman’s. A continued, multiple restaging occurs each time the viewer observes the documentation, without any originary event necessarily taking precedence.

Despite not setting out to deliberately mislead all viewers, Newman has created a space which allows for uncertainty and the misreading of the archival document. She states quite clearly this effect was her intention, that the work would become imbued with “anecdote and mythology” in the “vacuum” created by performance documentation.<sup>226</sup> Much like the 1970s performances referenced, the works making up *Connotations* have gained their own legacy and taken on some of the mythic qualities described in the previous chapter. In becoming the subject of misinterpretation and appropriation they have been lent performative qualities, and in being activated by each subsequent viewing the narrative-myth process continues.

---

<sup>224</sup> Ibid, 33 Vol. 1.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid, 32 Vol. 1.

<sup>226</sup> Hayley Newman, “Locating Performance,” Volume 1, 33.



Figure 24: Hayley Newman, *Connotations*, 1998.

*Caption: (B)in. Sitting in a bin bag waiting for bin men to pick me up in New York. When the bin men arrived at 4pm, I jumped out of the bag and ran home.*





Figure 25: Chris Burden, *Deadman*, 1972.

*Caption: At 8 p.m. I lay down on La Cienega Boulevard and was covered completely with a canvas tarpaulin. Two fifteen- minute flares were placed near me to alert cars. Just before the flares extinguished, a police car arrived. I was arrested and booked for causing a false emergency to be reported. Trial took place in Beverly Hills. After three days of deliberation, the jury failed to reach to decision, and the judge dismissed the case.*

One telling remark by Newman gives a clear indication of her intentions in making the work: that the misreading and multiple narratives around the work "will provide confusion for any future archivist, allowing my practice to escape their closure."<sup>227</sup> In this statement Newman appears to suggest that to have one, certain, universally accepted narrative of any work within the archive deadens that practice, for her as the artist and subsequent audiences. By encouraging contradictory accounts Newman maintains her work as an elusive entity, continuing in its mythologised performative process. However, this does not account for the fact that multiple interpretations of the documents within an archive will generally always exist - it is not the archivist's task to provide a meta-narrative of the documents, only to catalogue their presence within the context of other remains. Within the narrative of these works in her own thesis Newman demonstrates that these documents can be further interpreted by adding contextualising information and discussion around the work outside of what might be considered the archival document. The contents of archives are permanently open to multiple interpretations by both archivist and the researchers who use these sources. In this way the archival materials are dynamic and in flux through the reading of them from differing perspectives.

Newman's own analysis of the series is generally unconcerned by the (mainly false) narratives attached to the documents she has created. Whether the performances happened does not trouble her, since it was an intention of the work to cause confusion as opposed to deception. One consequence which Newman does not refer to is how it might also affect future readings of the archival remains of other performances, which either did take place as described or seem to be unlikely although we are presented with archival evidence. It may be an issue of contention, but there is an argument to be

---

<sup>227</sup> Ibid, Volume 1, 35.

made that the imagined future archivist referred to by Newman might be equally untroubled by the authenticity of the records. Their task would be to catalogue and care for the documents left by the artist, rather than try to decipher them. As long as the authenticity in regards to being part of Newman's process had been confirmed, their concern would be in the conservation of the materials and provenance, rather than assessing the value of the archive through the interpretation of its contents. More likely to experience the confusion (and even opposition) which Newman describes would be the art historian, who would be challenged in writing an accurate narrative of the work, and perhaps institutions such as the Live Art archive at the British Library who have a strongly defined type of collection, always linking back to specific live pieces in their aim to visually narrate the performance canon. The work, if it is to be represented truthfully needs a contextualisation not present in the photographs and texts alone, previously a function carried out by the notice in the gallery, or the statement as included in Newman's publication of the work.

*Connotations* was intended to allow a sense of uncertainty to enter the archive, but it is the later effects of misreading the documents which hold the real potential to mislead. Future art historians (rather than the future archivist) are most likely to create a contradictory set of commentaries around the work. If we accept the archive as a repository of documents from various sources which can never represent truth, but only the fact of their own production, work such as this by Newman ceases to pose a threat and so becomes a valid inclusion.

When compared with the work of influential earlier performance practitioners, *Connotations* provides a parallel and critical reading of these key pieces, through the absence of a performance at its centre. Both this early work and Newman's practice exist as documentation and are accessed by an audience without the need for a present live gesture (although it is worth noting, there is a sense of confusion and debate over whether these documents which are shown in galleries and sold to collectors *as art objects* are valid for inclusion in the archive proper). Newman's work builds on this by demonstrating that the absent live element does not need to have taken place for the

documents still to function. In turn, the revelation that Newman's work was never performed leads us as the viewer to question if these significant early performances took place, or doubt at least, if they happened as described in the documentation. If Newman's practice is to be described as something other than performance, then this holds consequences for works which exist solely through their documentation (ie, much of the performance canon).

Although *Connotations* did not stage performances in the manner that the text describes, it can be argued that a series of performative gestures did take place in the making of the documents. As Camilla Jalving describes,

"...the labour involved in the 'fake' performance is in no way less than the labour involved in an actual performance. This... points to the fact that Newman's way of not doing the performance is itself a performance."<sup>228</sup>

We might consider what takes place as a performance for and within the space of the archive: a document performance.

The works created by Newman are constructed and shot much in the way they might have been had the actions been genuine. The photographs included are, in fact, an accurate document of what took place; it is the texts accompanying them which mislead. This separation between the text and image elements of the work is described by Jalving as "a gap", and one which "Newman makes no attempt to hide."<sup>229</sup> This dynamic relationship between the two elements of the work is one which Newman has also noted, considering particularly how writing might frame these unmade works.

"I observed that it was in these texts where specific circumstantial detail such

---

<sup>228</sup> Jalving, Camilla, "Inventing Reality: On Truth and Lies in the Work of Hayley Newman," in *Performative Realism: Interdisciplinary Studies in Art and Media*, ed. Gade, Rune and Jerslev, Anne (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2005), 150.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid, 165.

as date, time, place and duration were combined with a description of the event and personal recount in order to expand the information presented in the image."<sup>230</sup>

In this manner, we can observe Newman utilising the effect of descriptive text on the images, and testing how far the audience will be complicit in the deception, by trusting the authoritative narrative. We might also consider the ways in which this takes place within the wider archive: that the text of the catalogue is considered authority and from a neutral stance, although we have scarce opportunities to test this.

Jalving reads *Connotations* in relation to Phelan's work on the performance archive. Opening with that frequently returned to quote by the writer on performance and disappearance,<sup>231</sup> Jalving asserts that, "Phelan's point is that disappearance is part of the ontology of performance: it must disappear in order to be performance."<sup>232</sup> However, Jalving recognises this as "paradoxical" since "the ontology of performance in this view is an ontology based on time and the ephemeral."<sup>233</sup> Continuing this stance, *Connotations* is deemed to be disproving Phelan's thesis in its ability to exist in a document form, beyond only the present moment. Jalving instead poses a reconfigured ontology in the light of Newman's practice which allows performance an existence not only in the present, but also the document.

However, it does seem more accurate to describe these text and photographic works as not themselves performance, particularly remembering they describe an action which never happened (as they describe). Instead, these documents exist as inactivated remains waiting for the live presence and interaction of the viewer to re/enact the

---

<sup>230</sup> Hayley Newman, "Locating Performance," 30.

<sup>231</sup> "Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance." Phelan, *Unmarked*, 146.

<sup>232</sup> Jalving, Camilla, "Inventing Reality: On Truth and Lies in the Work of Hayley Newman," 165.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*

sequence of events for themselves. It is this 'liveness' which is crucial to the work, as opposed to Newman's earlier actions creating the images, and creates a multiplicity of potential performances. Here we might observe the 'document performance'; situated within the archive, it still requires a live presence which necessarily has a temporal quality.

Jalving is correct in stating that performance documents need to be "regarded as works in their own right",<sup>234</sup> however this is already the case and does not represent Phelan's argument. In her text the documentation is accepted with the caveat it is not the performance itself, it is something other. Although we might observe a performance of sorts, it is clearly marked as 'other' – an alternative to the norm – on the boundary as it is between the live and the document, neither one nor the other. The *Connotations* series demonstrates that performances as documents can be located in the archive without contradicting Phelan, they exist in a state separate to original performance, by definition in the case of Newman's work since the 'original' never took place.

In operating in this way the documentation is also freed from the duty of accurately representing the performance; it is able to act solely as a signifier of itself, and as such is able to operate both as artwork and archive of a potential body of performance. This tension between the two possibilities sustains the work – the ability to be mistaken as genuine, or cause confusion is the aim of Newman, but it also allows for the continuation of the work in its constant reinterpretation by audiences encountering it for the first time. This placement of the continuing work within the archive as document also reminds the viewer that the archive does not validate the content of its documents, and in so doing may become complicit with the artist who seeks to undermine it.

### **3.1.3 Mel Brimfield - Constructing a Performance Narrative**

---

<sup>234</sup> Ibid, 171.

Where Newman engages with unmade performance within her own practice, Mel Brimfield restages and re-performs the history of performance, effectively adding a further layer of interaction and interpretation to the archive. Brimfield's subject matter is performance itself - she constructs a historical narrative of the form counter to reality, where artists and renowned works are re-contextualised shifting into the realm of kitsch British variety shows. In creating *This is Performance Art* (a touring exhibition, programme of performance events, and publication), Brimfield constructed a history of performance through remains she fabricated herself, taking inspiration from existing popular entertainment and theatre archives. Traces of these supposed events - such as promotional posters and invite cards - are reproduced alongside of photo documentation of genuine live events curated by Brimfield, and with commentary provided by the critic Sir Francis Spalding (played by actor Tony Green, created and scripted by Brimfield). She has also staged performances to/for the camera with herself as the performer, often working under pseudonyms and presented herself as a caricature version of 'the artist'.

The subjects of Brimfield's revised archives are often political, feminist, and body politic focused works which are established as key works in the live art canon. Brimfield has deliberately selected work we feel we know, despite most of the audience never having witnessed it, except via documentation. The framing of the work which the posters and related materials give is not necessarily any less accurate an interpretation than the remains within the archive, demonstrating the flexibility of these mythologised practices, and the potential to re-contextualise the archive.

The style of British popular variety theatre of the mid-20th Century which Brimfield chooses to mimic in her work is a juxtaposition at once comedic and revealing, asking why should these two performative forms not be described through and by one another? According to Matt Fenton, Brimfield's version of the performative narrative retains something more of the "dangerous beauty and dark humour"<sup>235</sup> in these performances

---

<sup>235</sup> Mel Brimfield, *This Is Performance Art* (London: Black Dog Pub., 2011), 7.

rather than the stilted, repeated, existing narrative of their history. Ultimately, neither of the interpretations (Brimfield's or the accepted version) can be judged as completely 'valid', relying as they do on constructed documentation and anecdotal witnessing of the work.

"...the paths that Brimfield's work will lead [the reader] on are likely to be richer and closer to the past than looking at the few perpetually reproduced documents of performance art history, photography that have problematically come to stand in for, or even become, the work they purport to document."<sup>236</sup>

In the way Fenton describes, we might consider the work of Brimfield as noting the absence of the artwork as live act, much in the same way that Matthew Reason cites the video recordings of work as only marking further their loss. Particularly a focus for Brimfield's output is the work of early feminist performers, with the unsettling effect of the work being stripped of this context, the sexual nature of the works are advertised as the draw. One example comes in the form of the imagined show for which Brimfield produces a programme with the appropriated title *Genital Panic* (1968-9) - repositioning the work as a raunchy variety show. Played out through a programme listing half-remembered feminist performances are rewritten into a different narrative: Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* (1964) becomes a "burlesque extravaganza". The original version of *Genital Panic* by Valerie Export was documented itself with a later staged, theatrical photo removed from the context of the original performance (but an image that has nonetheless come to represent the work). Export herself built a fictionalised, uncertain mythology up around the work - with some accounts from the artist casting the performance as a silent piece at an artist film screening, or a confrontational, vocal work at a pornographic cinema. Brimfield adopts the title of this and other works in demonstrating how the 'true' version of a narrative might be obscured by deliberately constructed, misleading documents and accounts, from later interpretations or the artists and live audience themselves.

---

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.





Figure 26: Mel Brimfield, *This is Performance Art* (2011), pp.16





Figure 27: Mel Brimfield, *This is Performance Art* (2011), pp.17

Reimagining performance history in this manner places it within the same context as popular entertainment shows, rather than as an impenetrable and distant form. What is viewed as serious, feminist practice is re-explored here as comedic, exploitative, and kitsch. The grainy black and white photos are familiar as the sources from which history is plotted, yet represent the reality of the works no more than Brimfield's practice does. Ultimately, the experience of witnessing is unknowable, an approximation pieced together through a distinctly removed reading of the remains, the live gesture having long passed. This body of work plays with the possibility that none of these pieces have been documented in the way they happened, and so any interpretation (even one which so widely mistakes the intentions of the artists) can be understood as a proxy truth for the absent live work. As an audience we can enter into this fictional potential of the work and whilst engaging with the contents imagine the effects of a parallel history of performance practice.

Although the performance documentation is fabricated by Brimfield, the aesthetics and inspiration for the remodelling clearly lies in a period of research time spent with *Variety* and popular entertainment archives (particularly those found at the Lancaster University archive) alongside an immersion in the history of early feminist performance. Like much performance of the early to mid 20th Century there is little AV documentation remaining from these theatre performances, just as the documents available for early feminist live artworks can be scarce or incomplete. This creates a link between the two seemingly distant forms, Brimfield describes,

"There's a parallel there to the notoriously slippery history of performance art, and the way it's impossible to form an objective overview when the documentation is so partial. That similarity is one of the things that make my fictional histories at least partly plausible."<sup>237</sup>

This complex set of layered (false) narratives give a sense of how instable and open to

---

<sup>237</sup> Ibid, 67.

appropriation the archival fragments of a history are. The faked documents offer an abstracted mirror, and the *potential* for mistaking the interpretation as genuine is an important one. Brimfield has commented that she viewed Peggy Phelan's commentary on the performance archive a "provocation", and that she navigated towards the 'something else' Phelan identified as the document of live work.<sup>238</sup> With this body of work, Brimfield has sought to illustrate that another space - the counter to a live work - can be a rich field where the documents themselves enter a type of performance. She cites her approach as "devising a technique for performance that's actively based on figuring and refiguring documents of it before, during and after the staging."<sup>239</sup>

In Brimfield's fictional accounts there are a number of complex half-truths; joke propositions that become real performances, alongside the appropriation of genuine names and events. Working through faked documents allows Brimfield to offer an alternative narrative of the performance's canon. In this manner we might see her stance as aligning with Schneider's assertion that text can become the original and the live merely a recording. In *This is Performance Art* Matt Fenton remarks that Brimfield's practice represents "a devising process in reverse, a collaborative art practice that starts with the documentation and works backwards to the event."<sup>240</sup>

The work juxtaposes popular entertainment forms with the history of art, including references from a wide scope of work from this pool. When asked in an interview with Ceri Hand about how audiences might read this work, Brimfield noted that this is often asked in regards to her practice and continued;

“... maybe it’s doubly uncomfortable to insist on squashing so-called low brow or trashy forms up against exaggerated versions of the formal institutional machinery at work in the assimilation of live art within a gallery context. I try and hand the content and the context of the work over to the

---

<sup>238</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid, 8.

viewers, and plant very obvious gags to offset the more obscure references”<sup>241</sup>

The character of Sir Francis Spalding (who Brimfield created and scripts) also assists the audience’s reading of the work. He is portrayed as “an overblown grotesque, a sort of Alan Partridge of cultural commentators”<sup>242</sup> according to Brimfield. His own slightly inept reading of the work as the supposed expert commentator allows the audience to question the reliability of the documents and narrative as presented to them, and to carry out their own reading of the work. The character of Spalding also allows Brimfield to demonstrate the potential multiple readings of the archive of performance, and that the documents may be co-opted to suit a number of agendas.

As both Fenton and Brimfield have described, the references made within the work tend towards popular mass entertainment juxtaposing this with performance practitioners, although an audience might be unaware of certain pieces of work, the content is clearly marked as humorous and pastiche, particularly in reference to the programmes and posters created. Matt Fenton goes on to characterise the work’s positioning between the narratives of performance and variety entertainment as, “somehow very timely.”<sup>243</sup> Fenton also points out that in his opinion the latter is in its own manner a form of performance practice - one which reaches a wider audience.

Whilst maintaining this sub-narrative grounded in performance, art history, Brimfield’s work is still accessible and read as comedic without prior knowledge of the pieces made subject and reworked (i.e. the restaging of Martha Rosler’s *Semiotics of the Kitchen*). The artworks referenced by Brimfield are given no higher status than the entertainers, comedians and TV shows that are also integrated into that output, and in this way Brimfield’s reframed history of performance is made, in one sense, more accessible than the reality.

---

<sup>241</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid, 10.

Within Brimfield's output there are a range of media and outputs employed, even though one project, in this case *This is Performance Art*. Alongside the faked ephemera of Vaudeville style shows are restaged photographs of performance, live works and texts. Collected together in the publication which accompanies the project these elements take on an archival tone – collected as they are in a retrospective manner. Although the individual elements can (and do) function as distinct pieces, it is in this archival set up that the project can really establish its aim of re-narrating a history of performance practice.

### 3.1.4 *WorkNotPresent*

#### ***WorkNotPresent***<sup>244</sup>

**Performance:** commissioned for *PRISM Manchester* at SWAYS bunker, Manchester, September 2013. Online performance with documentation in space.

**Archive:** Digital images and texts via Twitter, flyers and posters in print. Online Storify archive of the Twitter feed.

A performance relayed via a twitter account (@WorkNotPresent),<sup>245</sup> originally included in an evening of performance works which otherwise occurred in one space (SWAYS Bunker, Manchester). The online work was accessed through instructions given to the audience, with the 'live' work running through the evening, also accessible as a record of it following the event (reversed in order if following the Twitter feed, or in the original order via the Storify link).<sup>246</sup>

*Stretch. Limbs crack. Oxygen leaving in a rush.*

*9:25 PM - 20 Sep 2013*

---

<sup>244</sup> [hannahelizabethhallan.info/projects/worknotpresent/](http://hannahelizabethhallan.info/projects/worknotpresent/)

<sup>245</sup> [twitter.com/worknotpresent](https://twitter.com/worknotpresent)

<sup>246</sup> [storify.com/hannaheallan/worknotpresent](https://storify.com/hannaheallan/worknotpresent)

The performance event did not take place as was described - or hinted towards - in the online documentation. Instead, the images and texts were combined to create the impression of a work having been undertaken, borrowing from the aesthetics of early feminist video and performance artists. The texts accompanying these images are short, giving an *impression* of the imagined work, rather than descriptive details. This offers a narrative of what the artist-researcher might be considering in constructing a performance for the constricted, removed, online space, limited and led by the 140 character imposed form.

*Crawl. Drop. Head and knees scratch on carpet.*

*9:43 PM - 20 Sep 2013*

The digital form of Twitter placed constraints on the relationship between text and image, and specifically how they might be read together as descriptions of an action when combined with a loose narrative trajectory. This digital documentation of a performance is activated in a space which offers the potential for the work which did not take place to appear as real as one which had genuinely been carried out.

*Fake/reality*

*Shifting and uncertain bleeds between the two*

*Neither one or the other.*

*Hinting towards an ultimate insubstantiality*

*Nowhere, not even concrete in the gallery/bunker*

*WorkNotPresent* questions if a performance really needs to have taken place (as described) for its documents to be formed into a comprehensible archive and operate in the same manner as a 'genuine' archive might. The online space, and specifically social media, are sites where mythology and anecdote are particularly prone to development

and transmission.

*onetwothreefour*

*10:25 PM - 20 Sep 2013*

The temporality of the social media format aids the work in creating a trace of the work which is quickly buried and obscured, in a way that physical photo prints or texts in the gallery space do not.

*Jarred knees, rotating spine.*

*10:56 PM - 20 Sep 2013*

*Caught - fixed in frame.*

*10:59 PM - 20 Sep 2013*

*A gasp as lungs fill with ragged air.*

*11:12 PM - 20 Sep 2013*

*Pick away, paint splinters under nails.*

*11:33 PM - 20 Sep 2013*

*The constructed time of a distant now.*

*12:04 AM - 21 Sep 2013*



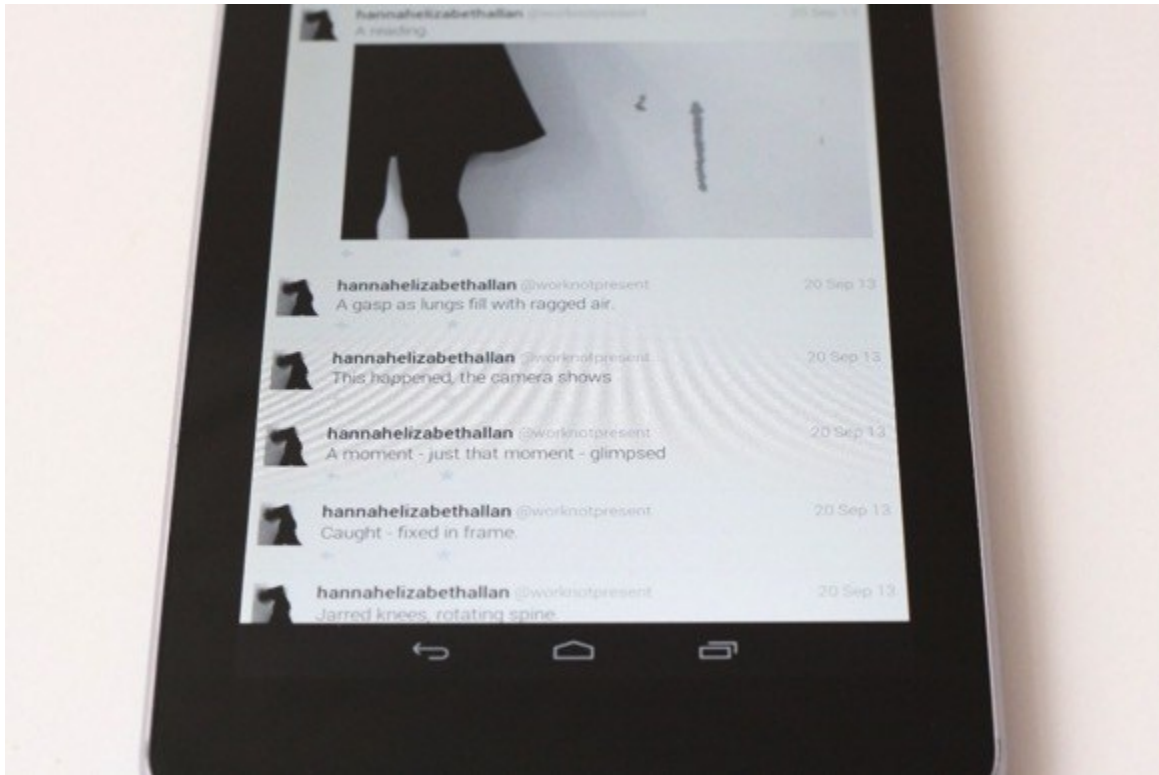


@worknotpresent

Follow 9pm -2am 20.09.13  
for online performance

PRISM Manchester  
Curated by Lionel Dobie  
Project

The SWAYS Bunker,  
Dickinson Street, Manchester

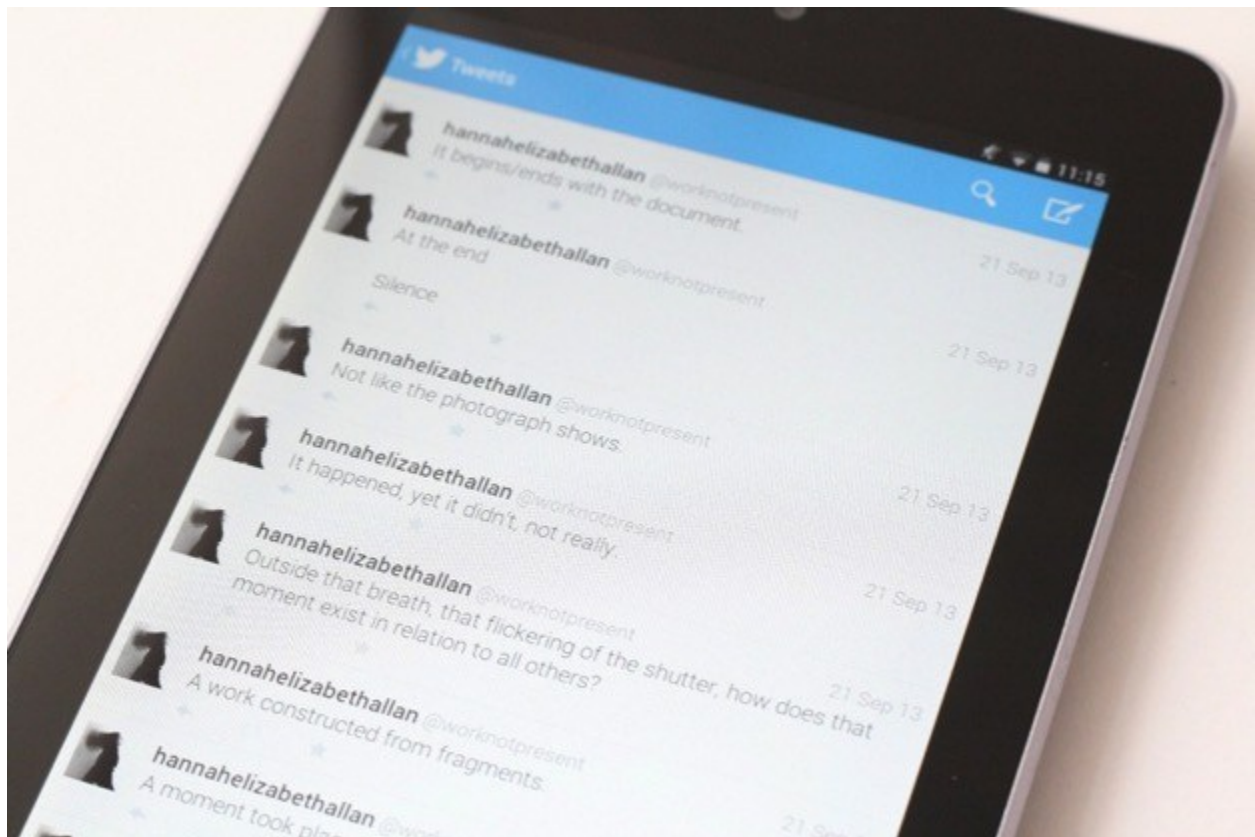


Document 16: *WorkNotPresent*, Twitter feed



Document 17: *WorkNotPresent*, Twitter feed

There is the question of if the audience for these documentary works care or are concerned by the reality of the gestures inferred. Particularly in the digital space the need for, and ability to validate events as 'real' seems uncertain and shifting. As is the case in Nemwan's practice it is not the documentation itself that deceives, but the given context which hints towards the documented performance work as an event being captured, rather than constructed archival remains.



Document 18: *WorkNotPresent*, Twitter feed

### 3.1.5 Uncertainty and the Performance Archive

Returning to *Connotations* we might consider Newman's documentation of non-performances as valid an entry into the archive as that of those which did take place (or are claimed to have done). There is little difference in Newman's *(B)in* piece and Burden's *Deadman* apart from in the case of the former, the viewer may or may not be aware of the process. By making work which names itself as fiction, however, it is marked as other, as counter-archival, and is treated in a different matter. Newman intended that archivists would be uncertain as to how they might deal with remains such as her practice, and perhaps in the future the story of the work might become further obscured making this more difficult. Aware of this deception, there is the chance that viewers might approach all work by the artist - or even all work documenting performance in this way - as potential fictions. Archives and artworks could be read differently, with a more cynical approach.

It is required in work which creates false archives that there is an element of doubt and confusion, which might allow for the viewer to read the work as genuine or not depending upon how closely they have followed the signs or context of the work. In the case of Brimfield this uncertainty allows her to establish an initial connection between the histories of performance art and British variety performance, before the audience might have realised the deceptive nature of her work.

In the case of both Newman and Brimfield their practice and its fictitious narrative allows them to question the authority of the narrative of the existing performance archive. Whilst undermining the integrity of the archive both artists also open up a space within that structure to situate an alternative or imagined performance and its faked documents.

### **3.2 The Constructed Archives of a Life**

Moving from a focus on performance practices, other artists have worked to create imagined documentations and fictions within a pseudo-archival space in their own practice. In the case of both Ilya Kabakov and the Atlas Group (artist Walid Raad) this space represents their own experience reframed through characters. These two artists have been selected for their similarity of situation and content of the work – creating archives which respond to the restrictive political landscape both artists occupied, and the differing approaches of each in authoring false narratives to communicate experience. Both offer a re-contextualised version of their own experiences through multiple narrators claiming to operate within and against the politics of Soviet era Russia and the Lebanese wars. Each use the potential in fictitious accounts to relay an equally valid version of truth in a situation where official accounts are restricted and often counter to the lived experience of the population. These assumed identities and multiple archivists and collectors allow for the parallel and contradictory viewpoints to exist in the work, attempting to give voice to the multiple and genuine experience of the populace.

The practice of both artists actively engages with the bureaucracy of archival management, each producing carefully ordered and annotated files. These artists play with the genuine practice of the archival profession in order to build a sense of reality around their fictions, and also comment on the writing of histories in the official sense.

#### **3.2.1 Ilya Kabakov – Characters within the Archive**

The practice of Ilya Kabakov combines drawing, text and installation, often using the setting of galleries to create pseudo-domestic environments which operate around the absent inhabitants. These imagined characters are curious individuals, who display traits of the uncanny in the layout of their domestic spaces and collected ephemera. Kabakov's works reflect the anxiety of living within the oppressive soviet regime through the isolated and obsessive nature of the inhabitants, whilst also reflecting on the

position of the artist within that culture. However, his earlier practice whilst still resident in Russia during the Soviet era, was, by necessity, not the installation practice most commonly associated with his output. Instead, work was created on papers, stored and displayed in files, using the materials and lexicon of the archive and surrounding bureaucracy to counter the official records held on citizens.

Working as a state appointed children's book illustrator in Moscow, Kabakov established himself within a circle of underground artists who despite their work being shown in galleries in the West, could not conduct public exhibitions of their work in Russia. During this time Kabakov's manner of working was mainly through paint and illustration, however he also began to create a number of documents (drawing and writing), which became the collections of albums – using a sparse black and white aesthetic quite distinct from his other output at this time. Claudia Jones cites Kabakov as having created over 50 individual albums (each focused around one character or theme) through 1970 to 1980.<sup>247</sup>

Each album is made up of loose sheets of paper featuring illustration and text in black ink, collected together in a card file. The subjects of the work are isolated individuals, despite living juxtaposed in the communal domestic housing of the time. The *10 Characters* series made from 1972-75 (later becoming an installation with the same title) conveys the stories of a fictional collection of artists, creating a loose collective mirroring the real one which Kabakov was a member. These characters are described by Boris Groys as, “a series of artists who live on the margins of society and whose work is neither understood, acknowledges, nor properly received.”<sup>248</sup> Each lone artist works in their environment, attempting a unique expression which is ultimately futile. A counter-culture which reflects that of Kabakov and his peers staging group crits and private exhibitions at one another's homes. The albums describe the artists' work and life in a detached style, using multiple voices who are in conflict in their

---

<sup>247</sup> Ilya Iossifovich Kabakov, Claudia Jolles, and Riverside Studios, *10 Albums, 10 Characters* (London: Riverside Studios, 1989), 4.

<sup>248</sup> Boris Groys et al., *Ilya Kabakov* (London: Phaidon, 1998), 34.

(mis)understanding of the work. Every album comes to an end with an announcement of the subject's death. Groys reflects on this ultimately bleak view of the potential archives misunderstood by a range of commentators as "representing the educated class that finally documents and administers the artist's legacy."<sup>249</sup>

Kabakov created these albums around the characters; artists who sought to establish a practice in an ultimately hostile environment, mirroring the attempts he and those around him made in establishing an avant-garde in Moscow at the time. However, the sketches and texts created in order to do this appropriate the aesthetic and materials of the bureaucratic system of governance. In creating the files on (fictitious) individuals, Kabakov apes the Soviet state in collecting banal and insignificant details on its citizens. The materials represent an archival method which is comparable to the work of the earlier avant-garde movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (although Kabakov claims he had no knowledge of these practices until much later.)<sup>250</sup> In *Albums*, the artist characters are marked within the archive, yet the traces of their practice are ultimately misunderstood and insignificant.

These albums (in particular *10 Characters*) became the basis for Kabakov's installation practice in the West following his move from Russia. The imagined protagonists were given physical spaces to occupy (or rather, occupy despite their absence) and their collected works and domestic space is marked through physical objects and traces. However, this has shifted the work once archival into a theatrical, immersive space. The characters no longer need to mark out a counter-archival presence, now they are given the specific place of the installation to occupy. The albums, their pared down aesthetic and blanks silences might now be read as a rough approximation of the installation work, a first draft. Jones recognises the significance in these earlier iterations stating, that they lay the foundation of Kabakov's future practice and, as such, need to be recognised as a central element of his work.<sup>251</sup>

---

<sup>249</sup> Ibid, 35 (Groys).

<sup>250</sup> David A. Ross, Boris Grois, and Iwona Blazwick, *Ilya Kabakov* (London : Phaidon, 1998), 12.

<sup>251</sup> Kabakov, Jolles, and Studios, *10 Albums, 10 Characters*, 4 (Jones).

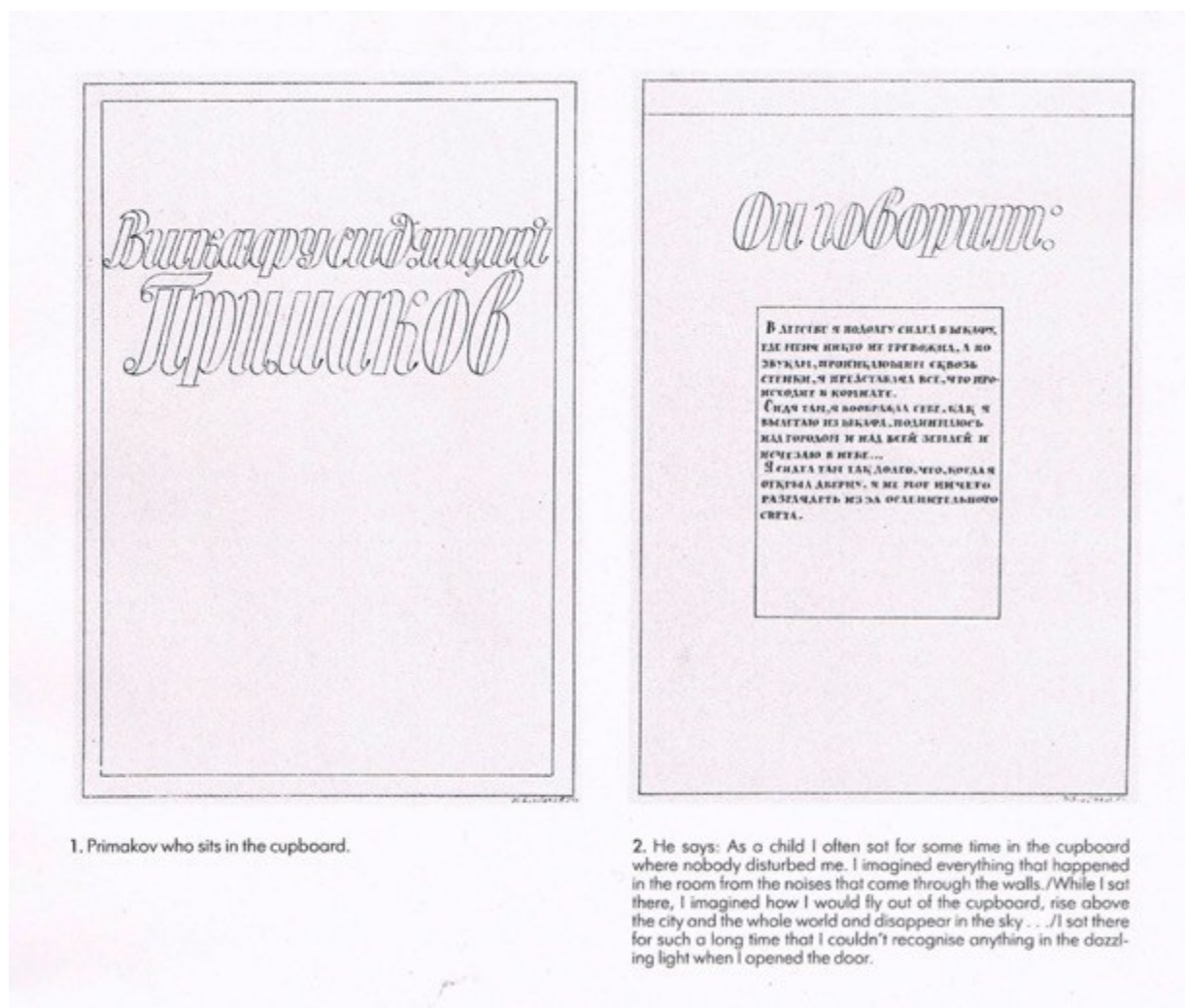


Figure 28: Ilya Kabakov, *10 Characters, Primakov* (1972-5)

The work can be viewed as a continuation of what Groys describes as the “novelistic tradition”<sup>252</sup> where there is an expectation of fictionalised characters being a device through which to deliver a truth (as held by the writer). Each of Kabakov’s subjects in *10 Characters* details different reactions to life within the Soviet system. Although these narratives are fictionalised they represent how Kabakov as an artist reacted to the socio-political landscape of the time, and as such, are a valuable addition to the archive.

It could also be argued that this misapprehension of the subject's output also reflects on

<sup>252</sup> Ross, Grois, and Blazwick, *Ilya Kabakov*, 60.



the way that all art when entering the archive might be misunderstood when removed from its context, and goes through multiple layers of translation and physical shifts (from artist, to the estate, to an archivist, to the historian).

Before creating the installation *10 Characters* Kabakov had attempted to show the albums in exhibition format (Porticus, Frankfurt in 1988). Jones describes this as an audience member - a restricted and linear narrative of the work. Kabakov created a “narrow corridor system with plinths arranged in a gradual zig-zag, determining the viewer’s route.”<sup>253</sup> This method of exhibiting the work was restrictive but prone to overcrowding in the gallery environment as each viewer attempted to read the albums placed in the plastic files at each stage. This original showing of the work, illustrates best a frustrated expression within the confines of a bureaucratic system: it is restrictive, difficult to navigate and lacking the aesthetic richness and theatricality of the later installations. The characters created display an obsessive need to produce, collect and record in their day to day lives. Both their expressions and the worlds created by Kabakov reflects a need to produce and remember – an archive that can be marked as individual.

### **3.2.2 The Atlas Group – Unreliable Histories**

The work of Walid Raad, under the pseudonym of the Atlas Group organisation, presents a rhizomatic fictitious archive which emerged from the years of the Lebanese conflict 1975-1991. The body of work demonstrates the ways in which histories of conflict and traumatic memory can potentially be narrated through false documents. Like Kabakov, the characters which the work is narrated by, or deemed to be the product of are fictional (although the situation and context is real). The Atlas Group archives question whether fictitious documents might be read as a valid source on the period. Clearly, the invented characters and narratives may be a troubling aspect for

---

<sup>253</sup> Kabakov, Jolles, and Studios, *10 Albums, 10 Characters*, 7 (Jones).

archivists and historians – those such as Ricoeur who have established a fixed definition for the content and provenance of such records. However, Raad was resident in Lebanon during the conflict, and the resulting practice stems from this experience, creating a fictionalised representation of that time. This work connects with Derrida and Taylor's reading of the archive as an innately constructed and partisan format for encoding history. Raad rides this thought to a conclusion which ends in creating fictional archives to establish a truth.

The work disseminated under the Atlas Group is a shifting body which crosses disciplinary boundaries; at times described and shown as variations on, a physical archival holding, exhibition, publication, digital construct and performative lecture. This uncertainty of the form only adds to the confusion and mythology surrounding the ever evolving project. In accounts of Raad's output the work is recontextualised by each writer according to their own narrative stance and the specific representation of the project they have accessed - just as the fragments of history are formed and rewritten by each historian/viewer. The documents contained within the Atlas Group framework resist any straightforward narrative of the conflict's span: they move through abstracted images, topographic studies of objects, to personal highly biographical viewpoints. The fragments that make up the archive demonstrate the attempt - and failure - to provide through these remains a coherent explanation of a chaotic and irrational period in Lebanese history. In using the archive to carry out this impulse Raad adopts a form that can itself be co-opted, as Spieker points to its corruption in the Communist era, "it served as a tool for widespread repression and collective amnesia."<sup>254</sup>

The notion of using archives in order to undermine the status quo is also evident in the work of Brimfield and Newman who both use the form to question how artworks are recorded and the nature of reading documents. However, Raad's use of the faked archive is potentially read in a different context, outside of the art gallery as genuine historical witness to the Lebanese wars. In this case the value (and potential damage)

---

<sup>254</sup> Spieker, *Big Archive*, 160.

of fictionalised accounts bears a wider impact than those commenting on artistic practice. In the case of Kabakov the invented characters are clearly caricatures representing the concerns of the artist, representing their inner life and individual reactions to a situation. However, a number of Atlas Group files do have the aura of genuine semi-official documents. For example, in the reportage on car bombings which collects images and details of the cars used, or the buildings that have been destroyed in the conflict. These details are fiction, however, they are also believable, and the Atlas Group exhibitions or publications are not always marked clearly as such. Much as in the case of Newman even if these details are given to the immediate audience, there is always a secondary audience who discover the work without this contextualisation, and are likely (in some cases) to read it as genuine and also further disseminate this belief. Although we know that the bombings did take place, and many of the buildings destroyed looked like the ones Raad includes in his work, there is a potential for misunderstanding in future archives and narratives of the conflict. Although Raad may view the work as accurately accounting for his experience, it is nonetheless an expression which questions the validity of testimony and the witness in its believability.

In using the instable archival form Raad reflects on the uncertainty of the past-present-future dichotomy through lived traumatic experience. The film *Miraculous Beginnings* particularly illuminates this. The piece is shot on 8mm film, consisting of single exposures of everyday domestic scenes recorded when the author believed that the conflict had reached its end. We cannot be sure of how genuine this film is - yet it does not seem to matter, the work is loaded with the affect of a perpetually misplaced hope. The stuttering conveyor of everyday scenes acts as a testament to the inability to comprehend the 'moment' of history as it happens, as it becomes past/passed - it creates a document that speaks of uncertainty and instability.

In a similar reflection, the frequently reproduced frame from *Notebook 72, Missing Lebanese Wars*, depicts a photo frame of a horse race finish, with a number of handwritten notes described as the bets of Lebanese historians betting on the gap in time between the image and the actual completion of the race; a bet by historians on



the ultimate ineffectuality of the document in providing accurate evidence of the event.

"... no matter how alert the photographer might be, he will always fail to document the passing of the instant that marks the event... history seems to never be exactly where it is supposedly taking place."<sup>255</sup>

In this notebook we see that even the authority of the photographic document fails to provide a rendering of the information precisely required. There is a measured sense of irony that it is the historians who gamble on just how inaccurate (or how close to accuracy) these documents are. Raad suggests that historical narratives are simply the wagering of historians on which pieces of evidence within the archive are the least untrue – a compromise which is quite deliberately made. The slippage confirms the validity of the image. The document is always by nature incomplete, slightly beyond or before, never quite marking the moment. Ultimately, if the representation in the archive always is removed from the actual event, perhaps that distance can be expanded further still and cross the boundary into the present/future whilst remaining a valid document of the time.

Raad has frequently toured the Atlas Group archive through a series of lectures, Andre Lepecki has witnessed many and written an account of these, reflecting on the shift in Raad as presenter into an almost performance where he adopts the authenticity of both the academic convention and particularly notes his shift in accent to a pronounced Lebanese one - marking his 'having been there'.<sup>256</sup> It is also interesting to note that Raad at the beginning of each lecture always quite clearly marks the group as an imaginary one, its contributors equally fictitious, yet somehow, the audience equally seem to forget this. The authority of Raad's presentation mixed with the photographs as document, the sheer wealth of records, and the highly structured archival cataloguing

---

<sup>255</sup> André Lepecki, "After All, This Terror Was Not Without Reason': Unfiled Notes on the Atlas Group Archive," *The Drama Review* 50, no. 3 (August 24, 2006).

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid*, 90.

system all seem to work against this initial rational grounding of the remains as constructed by the artist alone.

Lepecki also points to the lecture format as being the most suited form for the dissemination of Atlas Group materials.<sup>257</sup> Within the lectures materials are never present as physical objects but rather projected photographs of them. The documents and traces are yet further removed, a copy of a copy without any real presence they become even less certain of a temporality.

"It is their presentation as virtual documents in the context of a lecture that adds performativity to their display, adding them to an ambiguous referential dimension - thanks to the theatrics of knowledge and authenticity created by Raad's performance."<sup>258</sup>

Lepecki's stance on the form of Raad's live work is uncertain, mirroring the artist's approach to this dissemination of the work. There is a shift from the scholarly lecture initially described towards a less positivistic and performative work as Raad hints towards playing a character, potentially that of the unreliable narrator. Lepecki describes this process as "a lecture that veered slowly, hesitantly, yet never quite fully openly, toward performance"<sup>259</sup> and this most clearly taking place by Raad adopting a pronounced middle eastern accent to validate his account as a genuine one.

Lepecki describes the live work chiefly through one specific performance; having seen the initial lecture *The Loudest Muttering Is Over: Case Studies from the Atlas Group Archive* in 2002. However, he also states that he has since seen a number of lectures given by Raad under the Atlas Group banner. This bank of knowledge results in Lepecki recounting the work as an experienced viewer, one who is entirely aware of the deception and Raad's identity of the artist rather than custodian or archivist of the

---

<sup>257</sup> Ibid, 94.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid, 90.

imagined Atlas Group pseudonym. In taking this stance Lepecki does not recount the experience as the casual viewer might understand it – expecting an academic lecture, with a creeping doubt which might occur with the increasingly bizarre details of the notebooks. The inexperienced audience member may experience the work through a process of coming to mistrust what increasingly appears an unreliable narrator, and in turn this leading to reflections on those historical narratives which they do trust, or reconsidering their trust placed in documents.

Although Lepecki notes the importance of the documents produced to the Atlas Group body of work and their significance as artefacts with a false narrative attached to them, he concentrates his discussion around the lectures given (as might be expected in *The Drama Review* journal). However, Lepecki also notes that in his opinion the exhibited format the work takes is deadened, with the authenticating affect of Raad's performance removed and "their ambiguous status disappears".<sup>260</sup> It is as though for Lepecki the physical presence of the documents confirms too much of a presence and temporality, with the impact being in a constant absence. In many cases the exhibition and publication of these works do not offer explanation of the work, rather, they leave the reading to the viewer alone without the authenticating or leading presence of Raad in character. The work is left as an archive proper – without a ready narrative, a set of documents open to interpretation and translation.

---

<sup>260</sup> Ibid, 94.

### 3.2.3 *Untitled (texts from the archive of)*<sup>261</sup>

#### ***Untitled (texts from the archive of), 2012***

**Exhibited locations:** *Curious Pursuits*, February 2012, The Portico, Manchester, and, *Ghost Station*, September 2012, Bletchley Park, Milton Keynes (curated by Arthertz.)

**Archive:** Six framed photographs, writing on reverse, pinned in box frames with caption. Three small photographs and box frames (displayed in the same manner). Three pages from paperback book with heavy black writing over the printed text, displayed in frames.

The three individual series of works were created in response to the notion of Victorian Spiritualism and the practice of automatic writing as a form of communication, trace of action, and deception. The work came about through an initial response to the site of the Portico Library in Manchester; a space which recalls the Victorian era in its appearance and holds a number of texts from this era, including a number linked to natural and super natural phenomena. Intervening into the space of the library with a fictional work seemed to lend a sense of authority, with each validating the other as genuine artefact and the subject of collection. This play between reality and fiction in the authorised space was important to the work, and continued with the intervention into Bletchley Park Museum. In both cases the situation of the work in the library and museum contexts shifted the pieces into being viewed as potentially genuine, in a way they might not be within the contemporary gallery, where the fictions and deceit might be more expected.

The work was presented as genuine archival finds from a collection bequeathed to an assumed character (my own involvement was cited as the archivist/researcher working with the collection) a Spiritualist medium whose niece held the artefacts. This was given as the explanation to both the audience and curators. How far they were receptive to

---

<sup>261</sup> [hannahelizabethhallan.info/untitled-texts](http://hannahelizabethhallan.info/untitled-texts)



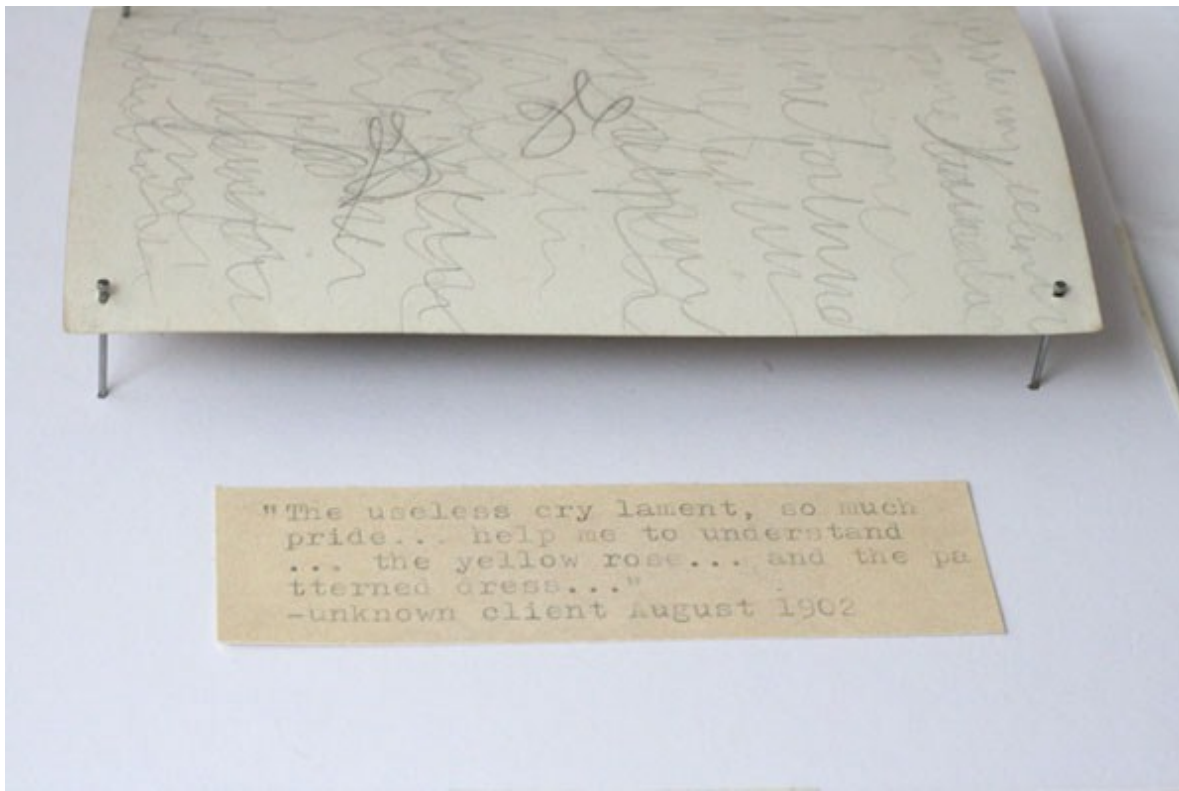
the given narrative was uncertain, a number of layers were open to questioning: the narrative of how and why the work was in an exhibition, the supposed 'translation' of the automatic writing, the practice of the writing itself. The play between reality and fiction in this type of document – when dealing with blurred realities – allowed for multiple readings. I became interested in where my own duplicity ended, and where that of the medium began.

*I speak to a tradition of deceit – a line of artists using the form as technique.  
Its own language of superstition.*

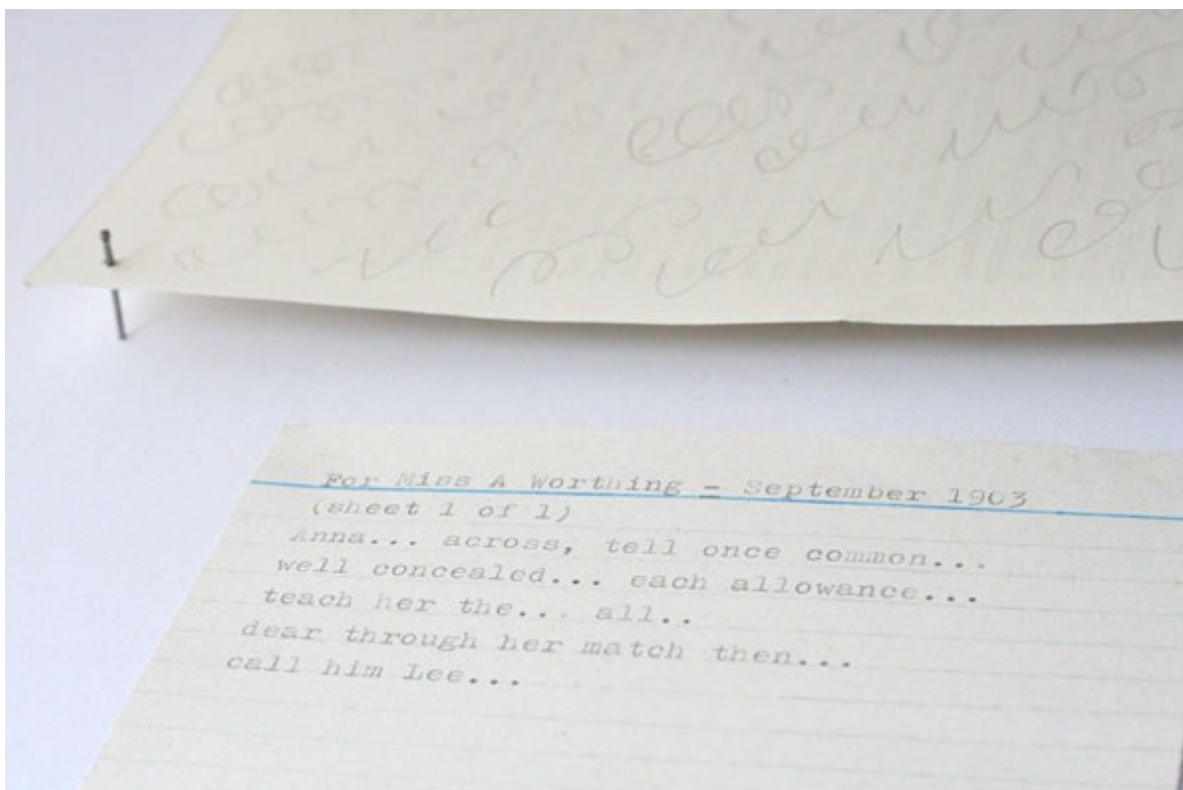
These works return to the idea that archivists seek work only with provenance rather than authenticity of content. Where these works were displayed only with my name (as is the case at Bletchley and the later series) they pass this criteria as work by the author, although it hints toward a different narrative. In the case of the Portico works the false description given marks the works as potentially anarchival, seeking validation as other than what they are. However, these works are placed in the library space by curators, rather than archivists, and in this sense the curator has no code of practice in relation to the truth or fiction of the work. In this way they intervene in the space as a collection might rather than the archivist: seeking to display an aesthetically pleasing body of objects and curios.

*A lie smaller than another one. Measured by relative comparison.  
The origins of the object become blurred.  
I stand uncertainly, explaining.*

The reverse of old photographs found on market stalls were inscribed with pencil, in looping lines and humps which attempts to speak of a language, yet in fact are indecipherable. To these I added 'translations' as captions which note what is supposedly said in the writing, along with the date of the work and the relative who requested the service.



Document 19: *From the Archive Of...*, detail



Document 20: *From the Archive Of...*, detail

*The institution culpable, complicit in this process of deception.  
Audience leave with the uncertain impression of an object, origin unclear.*

What is the truth in this situation is blurred, and it is the captions which really deceive the viewer, as opposed to the handwritten text. In this way the work operates in a way similar to Newman's *Connotations* series, where the photograph stands only for itself, but the text proposes another (fictitious) reading.

### **3.3 Invented Histories**

The consequences of creating invented histories such as these both undermine and confirm the need for the archive at once. The work of Raad and other practitioners working with the same methods demonstrates the potential of documents to be considered as genuine, or read in this manner in certain contexts (such as the work of Newman, often recounted as having been performed as described). Without the contextualising information these works are easily read as real accounts and witnesses. Although, as Newman described in her own work, it is the text and narrative accompanying the images or materials which provides the incorrect information to the viewer of such works.

Conversely, the fact that these fictions are able to be read as genuine accounts demonstrates the need for such documents, whether or not they are genuine. The work of Raad and Kabakov offers truths about living through the Lebanese conflict and Soviet era Russia – both artists experienced this but chose to communicate it through assumed characters and shifts in the specific details. This is to be contrasted with the repressed or even invented accounts from the official archives in both situations: both those in power and the artists countering their claims work via fictions, and in so doing confirm their need to attempt the construct of an archive.

In the case of the artists discussed here, each uses archival techniques and aesthetics to produce invented archives from vastly differing perspectives, communicating quite different ideas around what the archive is, or might be. These differences also highlight the potential of the archival form in relation to artistic process: what might come to be included within the structure, and how it might record individual experience (even if that is not necessarily a 'genuine' account.) All the examples demonstrate the ways in which information might be controlled or re-presented within the archive, thinking through the potential of documents to be misread or misrepresent what has taken place.

Despite the political and social commentary present in these works (particularly those of Kabokov and Raad), these artists have chosen to place their work definitively within the realm of the gallery or artistic publication. This is in contrast to an approach which might attempt to include these documents within archival structures or institutions proper, which would lead the work, and its intention to mislead in quite a different light. Rather, the work is intended to reach an arts audience instead of the historian or researcher, it exists as a false account yet not one that seeks to dominate genuine testimony housed within official archive. Instead, the artists mark their practice within the artistic context, staged as interventions and re-interpretations of a reality.

## 4.0 Text and the Archive

In considering the forms of historical knowledge alongside the archive Ricoeur has included in his study earlier formats of historical knowledge. In *Memory, History and Forgetting* Ricoeur cites the spoken word (testimony from the first person singular perspective) as the necessary pre-cursor to archival knowledge. Ricoeur as the historian values these forms of remembering shifted into the tangible expression of documents in a way which other commentators may not. Testimony is understood as an essentially live and performative gesture, however, to enter the archive it is re-encoded as a document. The action of recollection is recorded: separated from the speaker (the witness), and its moment of utterance. The form's immediacy and live qualities are stripped from it in order to be preserved within the archival structure, it becomes text, and in doing so is other from its original form as live speech.

Ricoeur considers transcriptions of oral testimonies to be a clear and valid element of the archive, not acknowledging that this shift of state represents a dramatic and total transformation. Some theorists around performance practice (such as Taylor) would argue that this requirement of the written form privileges that form of remembrance above all others, denying the traditions of non-Western cultures a voice in the historic narrative. However, we might also view this shift in a positive way - it might allow the traces of other times and cultures to be made present where once they were absent within the archive. This shift from oral to written testimony mirrors the complex and paradoxical nature of the trace in moving from a contemporary exchange to a retrospective one. Through this process the act of writing transposes the trace to document.

The dialogue between spoken and written language, from action to description, now becomes the focus of this study, in considering the form of the written document itself and what it hopes to represent and manage through text. Within my own practice this dichotomy is explored in work which is featured as both aural, audio pieces, and text works – all within the sphere of performative practice in the archive. How these are

situated within the archival structure, and in relation to each other is a central element of the work. The practice, and particularly the elements contained within this thesis demonstrate these traces of language, and the artist's role as witness.

The work by Ricoeur on historical forms of knowledge is particularly important in providing a model for the elements of the historical and cultural archive beyond the bureaucratic system which dominate. Although archives may contain all manner of records and ephemera, the traditional codes of practice focus on a particularly stifled representation of the form, most useful to those archivists working in local governance fields. Ricoeur's model encompasses a number of nuanced types of record, and also allows for a more fluid recognition of the records being potentially unreadable (or uncataloguable). This is evident in his description of the trace as being an object from a specific time which no longer makes sense, yet is still a valid source of knowledge.

Applied to artistic practice, Ricoeur's system of historic knowledge offers a potential for categorisation and the reading of work more nuanced and focused on form when compared with the archival standard description. In terms of text specifically, it allows us to consider the perspective from within which this language is formed, alongside how it is understood. This leads us to consider the stance of the author/artist of the text.

The creator of documentary text for the archive (in any of its iterations), might be considered the historic witness, which by extension includes those working as artists, writers and poets. The work of Giorgio Agamben is essential when we consider how the witness and language operate together as testimony both oral and written.

Testimony and the notion of the witness allows us to consider how the artist might take on this role within the structure of the archive. The collected traces of process and practice acting as an account from one particular individual. Here, the work of Agamben combines with Ricoeur's theory of trace and the operation of the archive; both complement the other in creating a vision for the structure and function of remembrance through the witness and their remaining traces. My own practice concentrates on how

the artist might function as witness, and through testimony mark their own actions, existence and practice. This work is read through the models of Agamben and Ricoeur, as outlined within the chapter.

Moving on from a consideration of the individual witness and the shift from language to text, toward the act of writing, and how it might be considered as an archival process in itself. In the work of Foucault the writer's presence and actions are considered a move against forgetting, marking the space of the writer as an individual, in a manner similar to the testimony of the witness. The act of writing is cast as a specific gesture of presence, which I test within practice which pushes the limits of what a statement of testimony or witness might consist of, and equally decontextualises language from subject or place. This experimentation around the nature of language within the archive is influenced by the Oulipo movement and particularly Georges Perec. Stylistically the movement and Perec imposed strict limitations, rules of observation and other methods of creating texts which provide a highly original form of witness between testimony and abstraction.

This moves back to a consideration of performance practice's archive through the text score. Both Fluxus scores and Oulipo create texts which describe a process, however, in the former example's case this score works not only as document of what has been, but is also intended as a precursor to future works; a method for encoding potential actions of the future. Each movement also demonstrates the difference in tone and communication to an audience whilst functioning as texts of process within the archive. Fluxus offers a playful and ambiguous invitation to future actions, whilst potentially also recording what has been – whereas Oulipo tends toward a style of complexity which demonstrates the intricate, self-imposed limitations set by the work's author.

Each aspect of this chapter considers the ways in which the artist – as an individual – may shift between written and spoken language in order to mark a presence within the archive. Moving on from the previous chapter's consideration of the potential gap between image and text in the cases of fictional archives, this element of work

considers the problematic nature of the individual in becoming an author of the archive.

In order to create a sense of narrative within the archive elements are juxtaposed, through their ordering a story or connections may be suggested. This process is carried out when archivists curate an exhibition of selected objects, or by the artist within their own archive. However, as suggested in the previous chapter this sense of narrative may be artificially imposed, and read by the viewer connecting otherwise disparate elements.

#### **4.1.1 Testimony in the Archive**

Ricoeur cites Agamben's account of bearing witness and testimony within the archive as definitive, if we remember that Ricoeur also defined testimony as a subjective form of the trace, then reading Agamben's work in the light of the definitions of trace and document is useful in this study. Equally, the notion of bearing witness and how that witnessing might be contained within the archive acts as a parallel to the debate around how live performance (or any artistic practice) can be interpreted or recorded in documents.

Agamben's study *Remnants of Auschwitz, the Witness and the Archive* focuses on this problem ('crisis') of testimony and its proper place within the archive. The crisis of this being in the dependence on the individual witness and their ability to recount that particular experience. As with Ricoeur's account of the archival elements, this enquiry comes from the perspective of the historian, yet includes elements of philosophy, ethics and linguistics, alongside references to artistic interpretations (mainly film and poetry).

This work, although focused around the issue of bearing witness to the Holocaust specifically within Agamben's text, is used by Ricoeur as a model through which to describe testimony and the witness within archives in a more general sense. Having been identified as the central text within this area, Agamben's work has been featured within Merewether's compilation *The Archive*, placing the extract of text within the realm



of visual arts critical theory. This is partnered by an excerpt of writing from artist and author Renée Green, whose work represents one of the other few applications of Agamben's testimony to artistic practice.

In a methodology which aims to reflect on the question and paradox of the witness, Agamben describes his own work as a "perpetual commentary on testimony".<sup>262</sup> This comment in particular reveals the impossibility demanded in bearing witness to the unspeakable, and hints toward the lacunae referred to as being at the centre of the archive. The gestural action of an attempted perpetual commentary implies a constant attempt to witness this absence, despite all its impossibility. For Agamben the central paradox of bearing witness to the Holocaust is that if no witness remained to speak their testimony, then the event should be without archive. This inconsistency in the act of bearing witness is referred to as the lacuna; that marked absence in the archive which Agamben attempts to repopulate through testimony. The event leaves a marked empty space replacing the archive or, at least it *should* since if to witness it meant that there was no chance of survival to speak and bear witness.

In this reading of what remains Agamben recognises testimony and the witness as the elements required to create a historical narrative; despite the potential for contradiction these elements lie at the foundation of the archive. Lived experience (in non-limit situations) is given as the standard method of remembrance that is disrupted by events such as the Holocaust which should (according to Agamben) have no witness. He uses the memory of the Holocaust as a means to challenge the archival structure, testing its limitations and function.

The text connects the problematic nature of bearing witness with an account of language's function in terms of testimony and how it might be situated - its context - within the archive. The mythic and 'unsayable' perception of the Holocaust is considered, and emphasising the importance of speaking of these events. Here, we see

---

<sup>262</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, New Ed (Cambridge, Mass; London: MIT Press, 2002), 15.

that paradox begin to form; those that did bear witness are the exceptions who survived (such as Levi) rather than the common experience of those people murdered. So, Agamben notes here the testimony instead comes from those bearing witness to the experience of others, a testimony once removed.

"Perhaps every word, every writing is born, in this sense, as testimony. This is why what is borne witness to cannot already be language or writing. It can only be something to which no one has borne witness. And this is the sound that arises from the lacuna, the non-language that one speaks when one is alone, the non-language to which language answers, in which language is born." <sup>263</sup>

Testimony itself is explored as a form by Agamben, the (non) language as spoken becomes his particular focus. How testimony is communicated by the witness tells of a secondary paradox - that in bearing witness language must break down into non-language, so that the impossibility of this act of bearing witness is made evident. Agamben points to this taking place in testimony through the lack of signifiers in the language, deconstructing any original coherence, whilst establishing a new meaning. The language is abstracted, yet despite this the intention remains and is read.

"It is thus necessary that the impossibility of bearing witness, the 'lacunae' that constitutes human language, collapses, giving way to a different impossibility of bearing witness - that which does not have language." <sup>264</sup>

We might consider this action of non-language spoken as testimony essential in marking the place of the individual speaker - they are made both present in language and within the archive. The lacuna which opens up is one which the speaker, the witness, might only navigate through a language beyond the signifier/signified and into a complex realm of 'other' forms of testimony.

---

<sup>263</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid, 39.

#### 4.1.2 The Artist as Witness

The potential of the witness within the archive, as giver of testimony, opens up what Agamben terms the lacunae of the archive, and is referenced by the interdisciplinary practitioner Renée Green in situating and understanding her own practice and authorship as an artist and writer. In recognising the limits of language and perception, Green refers to Agamben's work as having opened up a critical context for a practice which exists in a liminal, non-place. This also offers a potential position for the artist within the archive – a strategy for how they might operate as witness.

“A strain which occurs in my work has involved the probing of in-between spaces, which can appear to be holes, aporias, absences. For example, between what is said and what can be comprehended; between an event and its reinterpretation...”<sup>265</sup>

Green refers to her work as not only as attempting to represent a state of testimony beyond language, but also grounds it within a definitively physical space and characteristics. This physicality seems key in moving beyond language and giving non-language a form within the archival space. Green positions testimony and the archive as inextricably connected since archives are:

“the place where language produced by living and speaking beings is gathered, even in its inadequacy in textual form, yet it is also the place of absence and perhaps even more so of inadequacy despite its role of all encompassing housing, in terms of that which is not saved because it has not yet been articulated and recorded, or if it has been perhaps the words have not yet been animated because that which has been articulated and recorded has not yet been and may never be perceived.” (151)

---

<sup>265</sup> Renée Green, “Survival: Ruminations on Archival Lacunae,” in *Interarchive. Archival Practices and Sites in the Contemporary Art Field*, ed. Beatrice von Bismarck, Hans-Peter Feldmann, and Hans Ulrich Obrist (Cologne: Verlag Der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2002), 147.



Figure 30: Renée Green, *Partially Buried in Three Parts* (1996-97)

Green goes on to state that she views her practice as connecting to Agamben's theory in connecting the impossibility associated with language in limit situations, with the "impossibility of archives."<sup>266</sup> Potentially Green's best known work, *Partially Buried in Three Parts* (1996-97) offers a multi-layered re-reading of Robert Smithson's *Partially Buried Woodshed* (1970), the Kent University shootings which took place on the site, and Green's own personal memory and connection to the events and artwork. The piece demonstrates the ways in which an artist might employ an archival approach to place themselves as witness, offering a testimony beyond language in response to traumatic events. In this way the practitioner might respond to the limit situation, and the impossibility of archives, through the means of the archive itself, a paradoxical doubling back which mirrors that of the lacunae itself.

---

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

The installation *Partially Buried in Three Parts* offers a number of artefacts displayed in a setting somewhere between that of the archive and gallery: a number of video works are screened, alongside artefacts from the site itself, books and records from the era, and photographs of the Kent State protests. As a body of work we are given a context and the artefacts of an archive which accompany a series of specific memories (Green's own account of waiting for her mother to return from a university class that evening), and the enmeshing of these with a continued reflection on the site and response to Smithson's piece. Considering the form of the work itself, Monica E McTighe describes an installation which "break[s] down the hierarchy of these systems of order",<sup>267</sup> creating instead a space where the various categories of archival document and individual testimony intermingle, as do the shifts in time within the narrative.

"...her memories and experiences are organised indifferently as lists and indexes, but they can also have a narrative structure that guides the viewer's interactions with the materials the artist has gathered. She manages to produce an archive that includes, or at least can be read, as expressing an artistic subjectivity."<sup>268</sup>

Green's account offers an archival response to the issue of testimony: her own fragments of personal recollection are juxtaposed with documents and artefacts. The personal intermingles with the practical, non-emotional remains of that time. In this configuration of the archive Green positions her own memory and revisiting that space as only one of a number of elements within the installation. As viewers and readers we assess the archive left not as testimony, so much as a database representing that time. We are offered this contrast between the piecing together of the era through the database and the deeply personal accounts within the films' voice overs.

---

<sup>267</sup> McTighe, Monica E., "The Politics of Representation: Archive and Memory in the Work of Renee Green," in *Framed Spaces: Photography and Memory in Contemporary Installation Art* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press, 2012), 76.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid*, 77.

“Green’s work is distinct among archival installations in the way it is concerned with the involvement of the viewer in the process of reading and in the process of research in the piece.”<sup>269</sup>



Figure 31: Renée Green, *Partially Buried in Three Parts* (1996-97)

The varied body of artefacts represent Green’s memories of the time and place as a child, and are also the result of a return visit to the site, alongside her own historical and archival research. However, these elements ultimately encircle the impossibility of witnessing, or of one definitive testimony, from either the victims of the shooting or Smithson’s absent artwork. This dual absence at the centre of the

---

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

work allows Green to mark a space as the artist within and creating an archival account as witness, whilst maintaining Agamben's assertion that to do so remains an impossibility.

Moving to another example of the artist attempting to create a space for testimony within their work and the archive, Louise Bourgeois' *Insomnia Drawings* (1994-95) offer a different approach: one that is private, and not intended to be exhibited beyond the archive. The posthumously exhibited drawings and texts<sup>270</sup> consist of 220 A4 sheets which document the artist's experience from November 1994 to June 1995; a record of a sleepless half-life created in the early hours of each morning. This archival body of work uses repeated pattern and motif to create a method of recording experience beyond language – an artistic interpretation of how the non-language of Agamben's witness. Unlike Green, this work represents a personal experience and trauma without the backdrop of a wider socio-political narrative to which the artist is inadvertent witness. Instead, Bourgeois' experience is read on its own terms as that of an autobiographic record of personal and female trauma.

When exhibited at the Fruitmarket gallery these images were presented as a continuous linear narrative of Bourgeois' making. These demonstrate the creation of a lexicon of types with reoccurring themes and gestures which ebb and flow throughout the collection. The body of work exists as an archive due to the nature in which it was created by the artist: Bourgeois made each drawing and text recording and responding to her experiences, without any stated intention of them being exhibited. Instead, it was Bourgeois' assistant who collected and filed the images each morning, and they were not worked upon or reconsidered beyond the immediate moment of their creation. In this manner the body of work represents the process of the artist, and potentially acts as a personal testimony, grounded in the moment of witnessing an intensely personal state of trauma.

---

<sup>270</sup> *I Give Everything Away*, Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. 26 October 2013 – 23 February 2014.

The work also acts in a manner as involuntary testimony; the author has not 'spoken' for the archive, instead these drawings and texts have been retained almost incidentally, as traces of a personal experience. Beyond the intended purpose as statement of witnessing, or expression of trauma, they have been re-contextualised as an archive, and then as an art exhibition with the Fruitmarket show.

The drawings were exhibited alongside a variety of letters, poems and text works at the Fruitmarket show. These additional elements compound the impression the viewer has of the work making up part of an archival body. These texts tend to describe the nature of Bourgeois' trauma in a more immediate and descriptive (although poetic) manner. In contrast, the drawings instead use repeated motifs and physical repetition of lines to demonstrate the artist's sense of trauma, and reveal the work as an aesthetic testimony.

The work of Bourgeois and Green represent some of the difficulty in framing testimony within the archive, instead moving through artistic practice towards an aesthetic expression as alternative method to exist within that space. These forms also remain in a manner which spoken testimony may not. Ricoeur (and to an extent, Agamben) assume that the witness' words – or vocal non-language – is recorded, yet this both allows for testimony to be 'lost' and also negates the gestural or performative elements. The work of these two artists, archiving specific experiences, remains because of the form they have taken. The aesthetic works, drawn and written provide a remaining legacy and also mark quite visibly the trace of the artist and their physical presence.



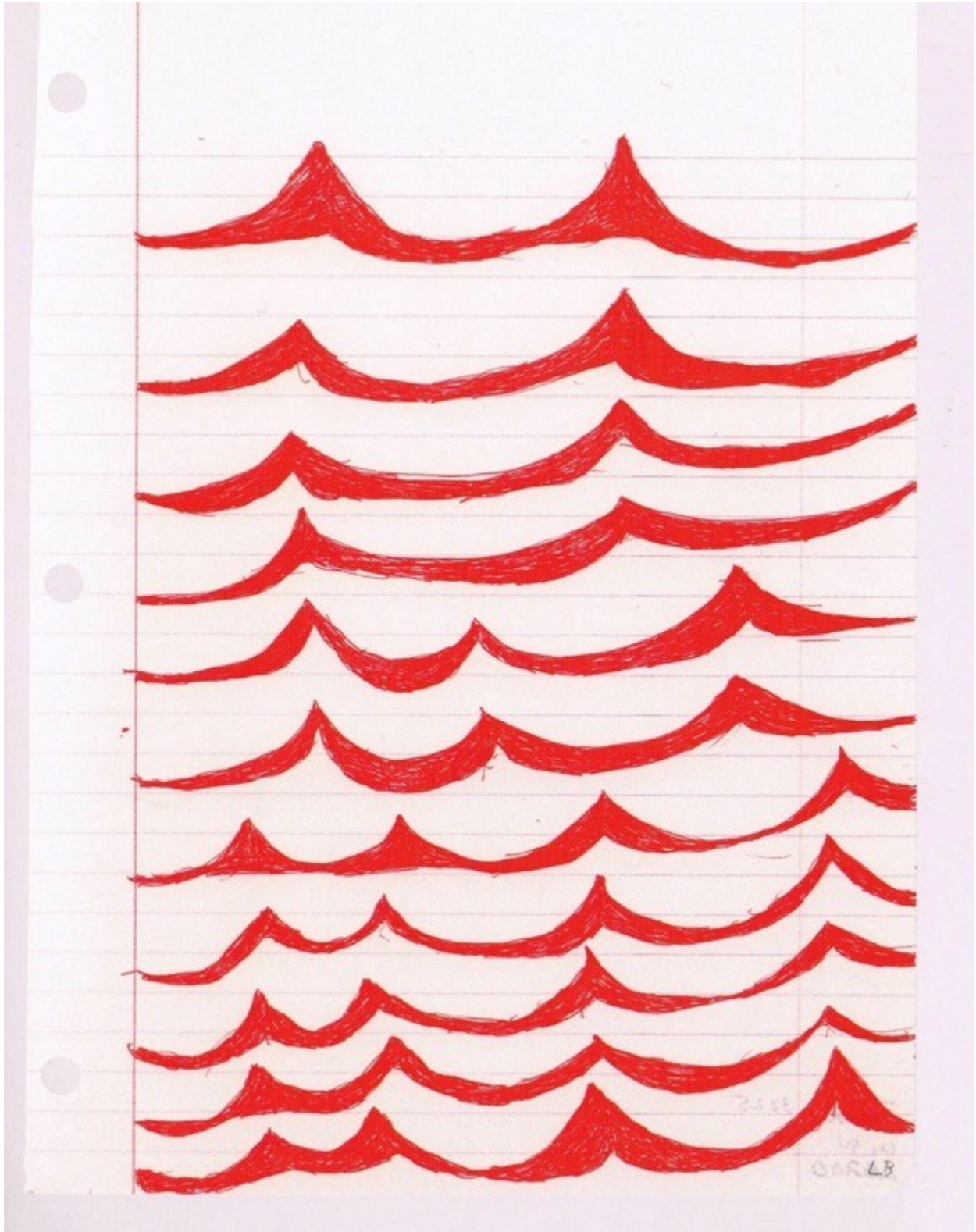


Figure 32: Louise Bourgeois, *Insomnia Drawings, #14* (1994-5)

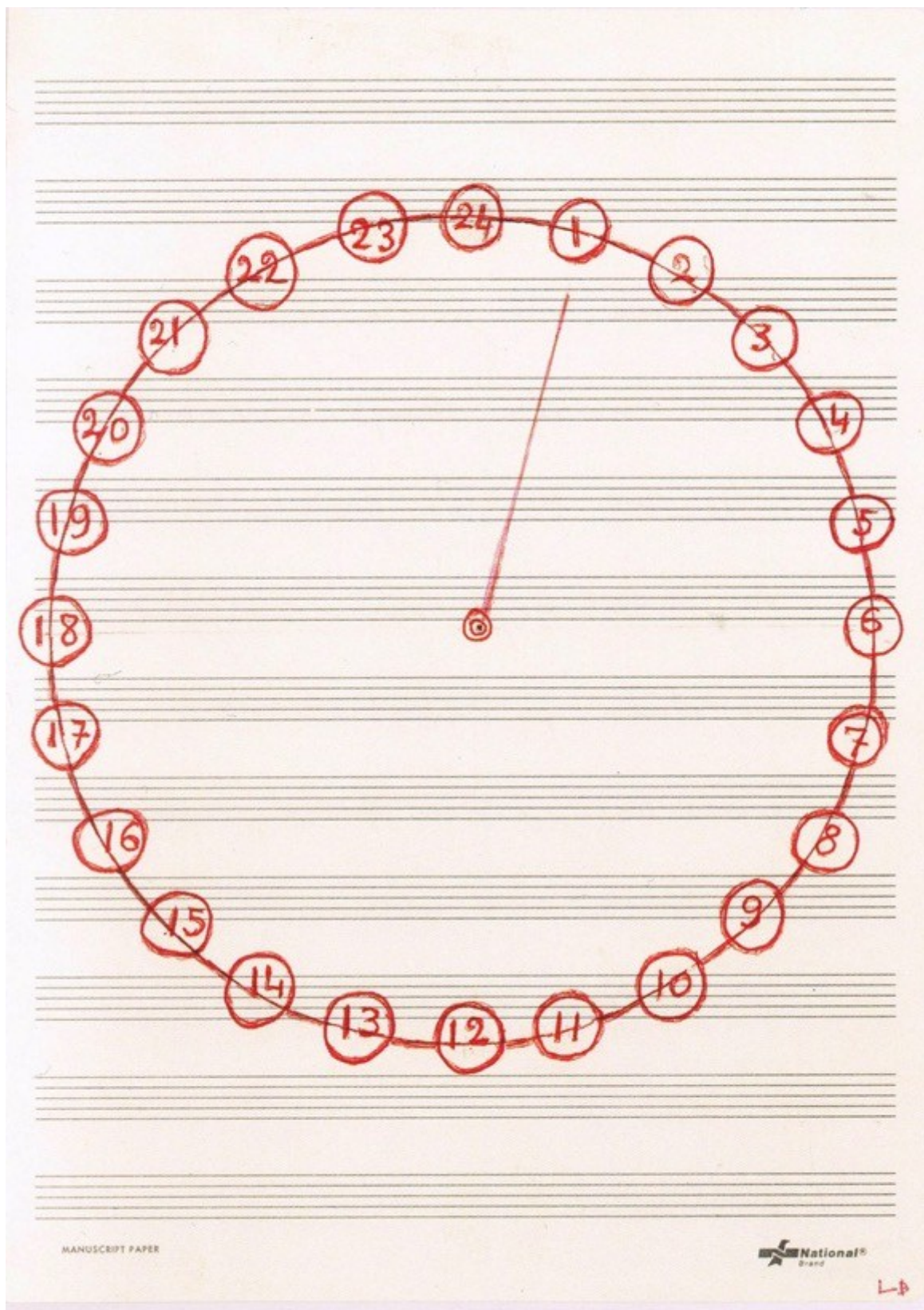


Figure 33: Louise Bourgeois, *Insomnia Drawings*, #163 (1994-5)

### 4.1.3 *I Spoke*

#### *I Spoke*<sup>271</sup>

**Work:** A durational audio piece played via headphones. For *In Other Words* exhibition, Bath Fringe Festival 2013, curated by Rowan Lear.

**Archive:** Online recording of the work, resulting texts.

Part of a body of work exploring spoken and written language, shifting the content and meaning of words from the dialectical signifier into the non-language of the archive. Language is transformed through repetition, abstraction and disorder.

*I Spoke*: a durational audio work.

*I spoke*

*I spoke*

*I spoke*

[repeating]

The same brief phrase is repeated throughout the duration of the looped recording. It acts as an audio document of what was a performance to no-one, in the empty space of a gallery underneath a railway arch. The act of recording, of speaking, does however point to a future, imagined listener – one is expected.

*It is repeated  
Stumbling,  
Words over themselves.*

*Low rumble of trains passing overhead, marking, overheard.  
Another echo, disembodied voice, joins my own.*

---

<sup>271</sup> hannahelizabethallan.info/i-spoke

*The two sounds ebb and flow, in and out of one another. Shifting into new formations. A fresh rhythm emerges, stresses and pauses moving. Control lost, the words begin to take over.*

As the piece continues there is a marked process of entropy, with the words moving from a recognisable statement of intent, to sound that moves across multiple meanings to incomprehensibility. Through this process the abstracted signs of language are removed, the action of speaking alone is what takes place. Breaking down these semiotic codes through the aural work, it is possible to create work which reflects solely upon the act of speech and its im/possibility.

Shifting into this type of speech, divorced from the signifier, the piece reflects on Agamben's vision of testimony: that non-language marks the place of the self. A fragile and unstable presence is recognised through this sound/gesture. It is at once pathetic and defiant, saying nothing other than the vocalisation of a 'self' in that particular moment.

As the words 'I spoke' becomes less clear the intention and meaning of the phrase comes to the fore - the performance increasingly gives way to a more basic sort of testimony and witnessing as the language deteriorates.

The work, however, is made present in the gallery and to the listener through a recording. Listening through headphones results in a direct dialogue with the listener. Played through speakers the voice is a constant presence within the space, it is already there whether the audience chooses to connect with the work or not.

*This assertion of presence is not present, it has passed. As document it enters the archive.*

The testimony and speaker are remote now, and we can no longer have any certainty if the speaker still speaks, only that they once did. The document transforms the live

testimony into a retrospective account, although, remaining as spoken language it allows for some connection to remain between the words as spoken action and their intention in marking a presence.

#### 4.1.4 Impossible Language

The work on language and writing by Foucault intersects with Agamben's theories on the witness and testimony's linguistic properties. In the essay *Language to Infinity* Foucault positions the act of writing as a means to survive the death of the individual. This 'act of writing' is analogous to bearing witness in Agamben's account, both action a conscious effort to create a testimony. Foucault recounts myths, where the hero must speak of victory in order to deny his death as told by others. In this way the story comes to be understood as a form between - one on the verge of death at all times.

"Headed toward death, language turns back upon itself, it encounters something like a mirror; and to stop this death which would stop it, it possesses but a single power: that of giving birth to its own image in a play of mirrors that have no limits."<sup>272</sup>

Agamben identified a non-language before language (as testimony), Foucault recognises that testimony as turning back into a non-language form. Although this transformation happens at different points both recognise the impossibility in bearing witness to death. Equally there is a lacuna at the heart of written language as there is in oral testimony: both break down when they attempt to describe the impossible, where written language moves into abstraction and metaphor.

Foucault identifies in this limit point of the language the development of a new form, of a language beyond language, opening under duress a non-language formless in its

---

<sup>272</sup> Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, New edition (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), 54.



abstraction. This new, self-representational form of language is divorced from the speaker. Language claims a legacy to infinity in its written form, yet Foucault argues this afterlife is not what instigated the shift from spoken word to the abstracted text, but rather that in creating a reflective liminal space an endlessly repeating image of the self beyond and before death is made evident. It is recognised that this effort of creating an infinite text allowed for a "murmuring which repeats, recounts, and redoubles itself endlessly..."<sup>273</sup> It seems that in this creation of the infinite the lacuna at the centre of the archive (of Agamben) is realised, as non-language is created through testimony.

Foucault recognises writing and the alphabet as elements in this effort of 'redoubling', not signifiers themselves, but pointing towards phonetic blocks, writing as an action always reforming back to speech and the speaker. The doubling and ceaseless repetition into a non-language beyond death begins to create an impossible infinite. After speech, this abstracted language (as text) falls outside of time, operating as trace in the intratemporal space, pointing to what has been yet present in this moment. Language (as writing) points toward itself and its own moment of creation: as inscribed marks and the act of speech. Foucault points towards any ontology of literature must begin with recognition of these self-referential usages.

In this essay Foucault hints toward what could be interpreted as the remnants of the death drive. In the concealment of these pointers to the doubling effects of language paralleled across infinite space they mimic Freud's belief only traces of artefacts absent can be found. These signs are defined as fragile, fleeting and uncertain things, noticeable where their division is marked, directing the reader. The concealed repeating signs are understood by Foucault as,

"... imperceptible, bordering on the futile. They manage to present themselves as faults - slight imperfections at the surface of a work: we might say they serve as an involuntary opening to the inexhaustible depths from

---

<sup>273</sup> Ibid, 55.

which they come to us."<sup>274</sup>

In this manner the action, or gesture, of the artwork behaves as language might. The traces of that moment (or the lack of them) pointing to that original moment of creation and its author.

Foucault goes on to cite Borges' *The Library of Babel* within which every conceivable text and language is housed where everything that has and can be spoken is recorded. Language here reaches beyond death in a representation of the infinite. However, in creating this infinity of endless speech it also descends into abstractions: the reflections distort the countless texts beyond comprehensibility.

Moving from the form of testimony to the figure of the witness themselves, Agamben adapts Foucault's work on language (found within *The Archaeology of Knowledge*) to demonstrate the aporia at the heart of 'the subject' in language, and the effect of this upon the speaker as witness. Agamben ultimately poses the twinned questions in setting out his area of enquiry: "How can a subject give an account of its own ruin?" and, "What happens in the living individual when he occupies the 'vacant place' of the subject?"<sup>275</sup>

These questions return to what was earlier termed the lacunae of the archive (that to witness what leaves no witnesses is an impossibility), now we are shifted to question how those present may provide testimony despite this. The problematic aspect is now if the speaker has been desubjectified by their experience how might they speak of it (as subject). Agamben believes that in stating that the subject is a vacant place Foucault has deliberately created a situation where the self of the speaker cannot be comprehended. In this way these meta-semantics can only focus upon the taking place, of language, not the individual author or the contents of the speech.

---

<sup>274</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>275</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 142.

Foucault's definition of the archive is described by Agamben as "the general system of the formation and transformation of statements."<sup>276</sup> The archive lies between the possibilities of speech and what has actually been spoken. It is the potential and possibility of what could be said without having been. (And in this reflects back to the library of Borges - not an attempting infinity however the archive need not descend into abstraction).

"The archive is thus the mass of the non-semantic inscribed in every meaningful discourse as a function of its enunciation; it is the dark margin encircling and limiting every concrete act of speech... the fragment of memory that is always forgotten in the act of saying 'I'."<sup>277</sup>

This space between the potential and actuality of speech is a refinement of earlier themes, and is defined by Agamben as where Foucault's process of archaeology takes place, a questioning of speech as action, linked to everything said and unsaid in the immediate moment. Agamben questions if this method can be shifted from language and speech to language and the archive. If the archive is defined as the relation between the said/unsaid, then testimony is defined as - the dichotomy between the sayable and unsayable, irrelevant of the language spoken, "Between a possibility and an impossibility of speech."<sup>278</sup>

Between this possibility and impossibility, a divide opens where within the archive all is reduced to empty subject, and in the case of testimony this emptiness at the heart of the subject is problematic. If testimony marks the juncture between speech and its taking place, then the impossibility of that speech going ahead must be considered. Authoring testimony is the possibility of speech, only made possible through its very impossibility. (Agamben cites the human as a body which inherently speaks, yet has no potential for language to exist within it.) The author of testimony, as witness, embodies these dual

---

<sup>276</sup> Ibid, 143.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid, 144.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid, 145.



paradoxes of impossibility and capacity for speech.<sup>279</sup> This fractured nature is acknowledged by Agamben as essential to the function of testimony: "The authority of the witness consists in his capacity to speak solely in the name of an incapacity to speak - that is, in his or her being a subject."<sup>280</sup>

Agamben denies the archive's ability to include testimony, it exists instead as the trace on language itself, similarly recognised as a remnant by Hannah Arendt (cited by Agamben).<sup>281</sup> Arendt's argument being that following the Holocaust and the ensuing cultural destruction, the form of language - 'the mother tongue' - remained. A dead language, one which cannot be spoken, and the position of subject is removed. Here, there is no potential for speech, only the closed archive of previous dialogue. Agamben connects this to the act of bearing witness: reprising closed events outside of the archival through the action of naming a subject in what has passed. The witness and the poet are recognised as making the same gesture, both create speech from the remains of language. This language bears itself witness to what cannot be archived. Here, a non-language of remnants, sounds, bear witness to what the recorded document cannot: the impossibility to articulate testimony.

"What cannot be stated, what cannot be archived, is the language in which the author succeeds in bearing witness to his incapacity to speak. In this language that survives the subjects who spoke it coincides with a speaker who remains beyond it."<sup>282</sup>

---

<sup>279</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid, 158.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid, 159.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid, 161 – 162.

#### 4.1.5 The Limits of Writing

As linguistic theory evolved beyond the Saussurian reliance on the sign, towards a basis on enunciation, Agamben notes the problematic that within this shift speech is enacted solely in the taking place of language. Each enunciation is defined as unique and unrepeatable, yet through this reframing it is stripped of meaning and its reference to an exterior reality. Agamben connects this to Foucault's use of statements as subject, "not the text of discourse but its taking place"<sup>283</sup> becomes the focus. Escaping classification these statements represent only themselves, the stripped back taking place of language. Foucault's process (of what he terms archaeology) refers to this taking place, outside of meaning, content or discipline.

Within this new framing of language the subject and author are even further destabilised. Agamben cites the declaration of 'I speak' as being linked to this taking place of language, and to a modern state of philosophy where rather than communicating meaning any discourse takes place. "Once the principle referent of study becomes statements, the subject is stripped of all substance, becoming pure function or pure position."<sup>284</sup> This lack of the subject, in Foucault's terms, is filled by language - enunciations meaning little yet constantly taking place. The author/speaker is rendered unnecessary, a space where the discourse can exist anonymously, in a stance which troubles Agamben with his focus upon the witness.

In the essay *A Preface to Transgression*, Foucault reflects on the nature of language in less abstracted terms by looking to the limits formed within language. Non-discursive language is the focus of the study, which according to Foucault holds a troubling position within culture; "neither complete nor fully in control of itself"<sup>285</sup>, and is used across transgressive forms of expression (erotic to philosophical writings). Discursive

---

<sup>283</sup> Ibid, 139.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid, 141.

<sup>285</sup> Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, 139.

language is always explicit, a continuous thread of language without the subject Foucault has already made absent, and is problematic in its effect upon the individual speaker.

Amongst these various expressions, Foucault makes it his aim to identify a common philosophy for the limit and nature of transgression. Positioning himself as searching for a new language of the transgressive, he again notes the absence of the speaker within its archive,

"...to speak of this experience and in making it speak from the depths where its language fails, from precisely the place where it would escape it, where the subject who speaks has just vanished."<sup>286</sup>

The function of language, according to Foucault, leads to both meaning and intention becoming obscured, much in the manner of Agamben's parallel study of language and impossibility in limit situations. Foucault identifies as this owing to the dependency of philosophical language on dialectical modes of thought, and it is only through tracing a line from Kant to the Greeks can the origins of a non-dialectical language be found, this seeking for an older method of expression, points not to a lack in the philosophical landscape, but "the profound silence"<sup>287</sup> of the modern, dialectical interpretation of language. Foucault goes on to question (as did Agamben) what language might result from such a silence, stripping language of dialectics allows for the inhabitant to recognise their faltering place within it.

The philosopher's place and subject within this dialectical language is no longer assured. Using the example of Bataille's attempted deconstruction of this status quo through attacking this subject and in doing so attempting to create a language devoid of this voice. This removal of subject allows Bataille to test the effects of its absence,

---

<sup>286</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid, 41.

"it proceeds to the limit and to this opening where its being surges forth, but where it is already completely lost, completely overflowing itself, emptied of itself to the point where it becomes an absolute void..."<sup>288</sup>

The limits of language and the writer are explored through self-imposed constrictions in the work of Georges Perec, part of the Oulipo literary movement. In working with written language in a form that reframes text as a pliable form which might be considered as allied with Foucault's search for a transgressive language beyond the dialectical. By imposing rules (such as writing a novel without the letter e) Perec draws attention to the language – text itself – as the thing, rather than what it points to or describes. In creating exercises and tests for language Perec attempts to find a remote way to record information through language. This approach points toward the attempted neutrality of the archive in simply recording the act of writing in itself. In doing so Perec attempts to remove himself as author of, or witness to, the text produced. However, in the works produced the self-imposed rules and act of recording the exterior world still references the nature of bearing witness to and producing testimony of sorts. The act of looking in the moment, or at specified times and places also speaks of a performativity inherent within the work – that it is deliberately located at a specific time and place.

In the example of the *Think/Classify* essay we see Perec commentating, or documenting the process of writing itself, of producing a text in the live moment, and across multiple temporalities (referring to collecting notes together at different times, the attempts at ordering them.)<sup>289</sup> The piece of writing describes not only what it is to write, or collect together the efforts of previous work, but also the process of ordering and mis-ordering those texts. Perec narrates the process of the writer/archivist as a creative one, with room for experimentation and juxtaposition of meaning.

---

<sup>288</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>289</sup> Georges Perec and John Sturrock, *Species of Space and Other Pieces: Georges Perec* (London: Penguin, 1997), 188.

Throughout the text (and other essays by Perec) we can see him as both made absent and present through the manner of writing: concentrating on the exterior world and its systems, yet ultimately filtered through Perec's writing and voice, however many rules are imposed upon that practice. This manner of working connects back to Duchamp's practice – the artistic self is attempted to be absented from the work, yet through this action ultimately remains.

#### 4.2.1 / *Wrote*

##### *I Wrote*<sup>290</sup>

**Performance:** Live durational work using a typewriter, listing words on sheets of card. Performed on 08.06.13 as part of *In Other Words* exhibition for Bath Fringe Festival 2013, curated by Rowan Lear.

**Archive:** Resulting typed text cards (A5), photographs of the work, digital audio recording of the piece.

The work consisted of typing lists of the words within the *Library of Babel* short story by Borges. The words were grouped by their first letter (although not in alphabetical order within that group, rather as they appeared within the text). They were typed as lists on A5 sized cards, a durational performance which lasted for three hours in total.

Here, writing operates in a similar way to speech in the accompanying work *I Spoke*: through the action of writing a statement of presence is made. In literal terms, a mark is left on the paper that tells of a physical action, but a sound recording of the piece also remains from the work, where the action alone (the sound of typing) is focused on rather than the product of the text.

The audio recording of the work (see online) allows the act of writing to remain

---

<sup>290</sup> [hannahelizabethallan.info/i-wrote](http://hannahelizabethallan.info/i-wrote)

independent of the text, as an abstracted action alone. In this way, the document of writing taking place moves closer to the non-language described by Agamben and Foucault, as an attempt to mark a presence through speech/writing.

Does it matter what the words mean? Typing lists in this way decontextualises the language, but also allows for the potential of narrative. The reader might begin to consider the missing words and the spaces between those typed. This might not be the same if the language was nonsense - a pure stream of action without meaning, or the only meaning that it has been written

*For example:*

*FivcuasfgvoishfaeowjdwqjvfiuegfiwohfiwhfpoiwehfioewhfbieInhfiewdnfioehfowe*

*Is not read in the same way as:*

*Bowling hat who found liked yellow time how counting*

The resulting texts seem too far from non-language although the language is abstracted it still holds the potential of meaning; the words have become visual signifiers for the reader to work through. The presence of the writer is no longer felt so acutely, and rather than being felt as absence they are forgotten; we read this writing as the 'product'.



Document 21: I Wrote, text produced during performance



Document 22: *I Wrote*, text produced during performance

#### 4.2.2 309 Words

##### **309 Words**<sup>291</sup>

**Archive:** Text work consisting of 309 typewritten index cards in box. For *In Other Words* exhibition for Bath Fringe Festival 2013, curated by Rowan Lear.

An arbitrary total of 309 words without repeats were selected from Borges' short story *Library of Babel* and typed individually onto index cards. These cards were stored in a random order within a box, and the audience were invited to browse and re-order the work as they wished, creating their own narrative. Having completed a partial transcription of the work, the language within the piece was re-arranged to create a

---

<sup>291</sup> [hannahelizabethallan.info/309-words](http://hannahelizabethallan.info/309-words)



new, nonsensical body of language.

*I watch as the cards are shuffled, discarded, reconsidered. With careful movements the chosen text is placed at the front of the box, the remaining cards discarded on the plinth below.*

The potential for abstraction within language is explored within this work - without a surrounding context the individual words become signifiers for meaning only, with the understanding and content of that message elsewhere. They become stranded, in isolation. They can no longer speak of a narrative easily followed, if present at all. All they can do is suggest a meaning, once tangible, which is no longer accessible.



Document 23: 309 Words, remaining object



Document 24: *309 Words*, exhibition view

#### 4.2.3 *Untitled (from Peer Gynt)*

##### *Untitled (from Peer Gynt)*<sup>292</sup>

**Archive:** Series of typewritten phrases on A4 paper (every stage direction in the play *Peer Gynt*), as artists' book. Notebooks copying out the phrases for work produced during residency at KHIO art academy, Oslo, March 2013.

The work is based on Ibsen's play *Peer Gynt*, removed from the text all stage directions are typewritten onto an individual sheet of paper. The resulting body of work is a hefty unbound text of sorts, the directions for the actors remain in the correct order, yet little or none of the original intended narrative can be read through the work. Instead, the piece relies on the juxtaposition of these markers, with the space between filled by the

---

<sup>292</sup> [hannahelizabethallan.info/untitled-from-peer-gynt](http://hannahelizabethallan.info/untitled-from-peer-gynt)

reader. In this way the piece mimics the reading of archival documents; we have accounts of actions carried out but need to connect them where absences occur between the documents.

*I sit and copy this phrases by hand in an unfamiliar library.*

*They present themselves as instructions, the characters and referents stripped bare.*

*An unfeeling chain of actions fragmented yet connected.*

The use of stage directions is chosen specifically as an element of text which functions in an unusual way - both as a marker of an action that has been carried out (we assume), and multiple repetitions that have yet to come. The text direction offers the potential of the document (marking and describing what has passed), without the rigidity of a photograph pinning the happening of that action to a specific time, place, person etc. The text instructions offer a different manner of documenting via language, one that exists between what has happened and what might.

The work seeks to contextualise the language, the directions to action, in an attempt to understand them as statements which remain beyond the surrounding narrative. As Foucault proposed the stripping away of meaning, so this work attempts to reduce the trace of gesture to its minimum component in language. The texts have the potential of gesture, both in marking or instigating it, yet are uncertain in communicating this meaning to the reader. The prompts removed from their referents, the viewer forced to create an imagined narrative connecting them.

*I follow the story, one that is nevertheless nonsensical.*

*Mirroring the original text.*

This work potentially mirrors the process by which materials enter the archive; de-contextualised and placed in juxtaposition to one another. A process where new meaning is potentially created, yet also where a sense of original narrative may be lost.

laughs scornfully

4

as before

5

### 4.3 Language beyond the Document

Language, and more specifically writing, can move outside of its archival purposes to also act as the instigator for new work. Returning to performative practices, we can consider the published review as a document - it allows for the reader to understand something of what has passed. This journalistic style of reportage is written for a reader who has not yet seen the work, and as such generally aims to illustrate the piece alongside communicating the writer's opinion. The script also functions as a form of written document from a performative work. However, as previously discussed in reference to the work of Schneider, the script is more complex than the review and its clear 'document' status. The script, whilst also a record of the words spoken during the performance, also holds within it the potential of a new work, a secondary performance. This duality of the script is true for the wide range of instructional texts and diagrams used in performance practice beyond the standardised theatrical script. The potential of these texts also moves on to a further iteration where we might consider them, as objects and artworks in their own right.

These instructional works occur within conceptual art in a range of situations; the performance scores by Fluxus artists, the proposals of Peter Liversidge (where only selected projects are followed through), or work from performance practitioners as text within a gallery or publication framework. Encountering these texts as art objects, there is a potential question as to whether any 'original' performance took place which these works are documents of. This question leads on to a consideration of whether these works exist within an archival context, or only as art pieces. If the texts remain *from* a previous action whilst simultaneously operating as an independent work *and* as potential instigator of future work, then they take on unique characteristics as both archival document and trace of an action not yet taken place.

### 4.3.1 Fluxus Scores

Considering this dynamic relationship between the archive and text-performance works, it is possible to identify a reversal of the process of testimony as described by Ricoeur. The testimony (represented by the text) may enter the archive before the gesture or performance it attempts to record has taken place. The Fluxus movement in particular formed an accepted style for the writing of instructional text works. Although it is not clear on reading which documents actual actions, or have resulted in further performances, each follows the succinct style with clear, sparse directions for repetition.

The Fluxus movement was formed around conceptual performance works, and with them the text score as artistic form was also developed. Much of this emerging movement was centred around the influence of John Cage and those artists taught by him in the late 1950s to early 1960s in New York. George Brecht was one of the earliest Fluxus figures, and *WaterYam* published in 1963 was one of the earliest examples of a text score not authored by Cage. The piece consisted of 55 cards with written scores housed within a box; operating both as instructions for a performance, an artist's publication and potentially exhibited object. At around the same time Yoko Ono authored *Grapefruit* (published in 1964), which collected a number of text scores by the artist in response to her painting practice. Ono was also a central figure in the New York Fluxus score, having hosted a number of performance happenings. Together, Cage, Brecht and Ono helped to define Fluxus as a performative conceptual practice of which these scores were a central element.

The performance scores (also referred to as event scores) had formed into a particular type of record by the time Brecht and Ono published their first works. Having derived from Cage's experimentation on the boundary between conceptual performance and contemporary music practice, the earliest scores experimented with the space of the page to represent pieces with both text and drawing. As this work, and Cage's students developed the form more within the artistic context, the texts went on to develop as text only pieces – often sparse and instructional in tone, often absurdist in the content.



Figure 34: George Brecht, *WaterYam* (1963)



Figure 35: George Brecht, *WaterYam* (1963)



“In the case of these event scores, their oddly condensed and inscrutable form perhaps facilitated their rapid circulation between performance, publication and exhibition formats: small, strange and belonging to no definable genre, they could go anywhere.”<sup>293</sup>

As described by Kotz the nature of the score form allowed the work to be dispersed beyond the gallery space, allowing for a wider audience and more immediate reactions to the developing movement. Like *arte povera*, the Fluxus movement was founded around the ideal of accessibility. These short typewritten instructions were easy to produce, as were the performances described. Some use detailed instructions, others allow the performer to create the work for themselves, as an individual interpretation. The equipment required generally is every day and readily available, to allow for ease of replication. The delivery of these instructions is generally deadpan, with elements of humour in the ridiculous (or sometimes improbable) actions described.

Published in 1967 the *Fluxus Workbook* collects a variety of these scores by various artists within one volume. It represents a standardised format and layout for the texts, and offers an overview of the practice at this later stage. The editor’s instructions clearly direct future performers of the works described to credit the individual artists – the authors of the texts – and within the publication layout the different sections are clearly marked for each author. This notion of originality and authorship is one which Fluxus often claimed to negate – however the focus on citing within the workbook does contradict this aim. Barthes’ essay on the death of the author was published in the same year as the workbook, however a democratisation of performance and conceptual practice was yet to reach a stage where the author remained anonymous. The workbook did however result in a standardisation in the presentation of the texts, almost Soviet in its regulation and consistency.

---

<sup>293</sup> Liz Kotz, *Words to Be Looked at: Language in 1960s Art* (London: MIT, 2007), 63.

“Their reproduction in various broadsheets and little magazines of the time, had a provocative levelling effect: reproduced in the space of the page, all words become simply writing, ‘print’.”<sup>294</sup>

As Kotz states, this levelling effect resulted in the text alone remaining – removed from the individual works by artists such as Brecht and Ono. As a result the workbook publication functioned less as art object. Although work such as *WaterYam* have been shown within the exhibition context, the workbook tends to feature only within the library or collections of artist’s books. This hints toward the fact that if these text works are not considered art objects, they then take on a more archival status through their situation.

The *Do It* exhibition curated by Hans Obrist and touring worldwide<sup>295</sup> demonstrates some of the complex issues and difficulties in performance scores being shown as artworks in the gallery context. The show consists of the scores as text panels, vinyl lettering, and rough photocopies from a range of artists from early Fluxus work (Yoko Ono) to renowned current art names (Damien Hirst, Ai Weiwei). The photocopies stacked in print boxes work well; the visitors collect copies of the work and might either encounter them as work to be read or instructions for an action to be carried out. Less successfully a number of the scores were displayed alongside evidence of their having been undertaken. This clear cycle of text leading to an action which was documented in the gallery space, seemed to deaden the score as an instructional representation of a future work.

As the text performance score shifts from library to gallery, its function also shifts. The work within a library or archival type situation allows us to consider the score as both document and trace of a potential future, yet not as art in itself (bearing in mind the archive also claims it does not house the art object). However, when that context shifts to the gallery or museum institution, so the placement of the work ends its presence as

---

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> First conceived in Paris, 1993, the show has since toured to over 50 international venues including Manchester Art Gallery in 2013.

instigator. The context within the gallery indicates that the author is the sole artist and the object itself is the stated outcome.

The performance score represents Ricoeur's concept of intratemporality in action, displayed in the score's bonds to both past and future actions. It tells little of the reality of each gesture, yet remains as a trace of both. Although we cannot be certain that either performance took place as described, it is evident that they did stem from an original action (that of writing) by the artist and that they have an existence in the present and future as an indication of that original gesture (i.e. a trace). They go beyond Ricoeur's usual description of intratemporality in that they also hope to instigate a future actions as a direct result.

#### 4.3.2 Scores for a Performance

##### ***Scores for a Performance***<sup>296</sup>

**Process:** Month long residency April 2013, Lionel Dobie Project, Manchester, including workshop around archiving (Chatch-Up, Practice as Archive), and PostView event disseminating the research residency as an installation.

**Archive:** Publication from Cha.Let residency, A5 (performance scores with accompanying essay.) Series index cards with writing/drawings by participants in workshop. Various notes, photographs and notebook recording the residency work.

The residency begins with the working title *Performing the Archive*, and the following questions (reprinted in the essay):

When is the artist present?

How can a gesture become trace?

What is the truth in documents which have the potential to 'lie'?

---

<sup>296</sup> [hannahelizabethhallan.info/chalet-residency](http://hannahelizabethhallan.info/chalet-residency)

The initial point of inquiry aims to explore how performative interventions in a space might be transposed from the present to past tense via the document, and whether these remains might be considered 'the practice' themselves. As the work developed this body of work became focused on the text score, and how it specifically operated in the circumstances described.

Resulting from the residency came a publication with a site specific series of scores for performances which may/may not have taken place, also in the publication was a short essay, excerpts of which are reworked below (link out to whole book online). Another outcome was the installation of research and process materials within the project space to mark the close of the residency. This attempted to reveal process as integral to, and an outcome in itself, in relation to what the artistic archive might hold.

The score presents itself as one of the most problematic and paradoxical expressions of the live and its aftermath, at once the pre cursor and remainder of an action. Here, lies a further complication that the action itself may not have occurred. The work itself deals with this impossibility as increasingly improbable actions are described within the accounts. The accompanying text reflects this, itself circling into an abstracted form.

*The archive describes an absence.*

*Past/passed events are only present through traces, which ultimately depict their own  
insufficiency.*

*Here, performance is the means by which to create a lacuna within the practice and  
documents, the scores suggest yet do not manifest it.*

*Non-performance becomes a description for a practice and methodology that describes  
these absences.*

*A lack, entropy, aporia...*

'Non-performance' is used as a term to describe this writing around a performance that has not necessarily taken place. It marks out specifically the absence inherent in these

texts. That lack becomes the subject of the work.

*A performance score describes an action that will/has taken place.*

*A score is at once document and script: a recording and a possibility.*

*Past and future gesture, whilst art object in the present.*

*Text score strips performance to its simplest possible expression, creating an object that  
instructs and instigates further action.*

*The texts act as a work in themselves, read as an output of the artist, with future  
performances also in their name (they must be credited as author).*

*The score has never and always been, it is potential existence and relic at once.*

*A mobius loop, circling, passing.*

The reader completes the work, the imaginary space of the present provides a proxy space for the performance to inhabit; the actions and scenario worked through by that reader, activating the work. This 'live' work of the score is undertaken by the reader - participant.

*The score demonstrates intratemporality (in)action.*

*A contradictory existence, tested.*

Are we to take these scores at 'face value'? Were they ever intended to be performed?

*These scores respond to the environment, they echo in its boundaries.*

*Site is a witness to the actions.*

*Locating the work whilst noting its absurdity is simultaneously possible.*

*Site acts as palimpsest.*

### Type, No Repeats

1. Choose a text.
2. Type every unique word as it occurs. Do not repeat any words.
3. Stop at 309.

As the texts can be read as a relic of potential performance, so the Chalet residency space can be read as the site of them. Scores created during the residency are site specific, in dialogue with the space - a direct result of situating my inquiry within the research centre. Artist is witness to the altered nature of the site - the score, relics and archive become testimony of this shift.

The scores/traces do not necessarily indicate the nature of their witness, only the sense that 'something' has occurred. This practice framed as 'non-performance', highlights the absence of performance. The absence of performance is interpreted and viewed through its traces. A paradoxical cycle, which depends upon the distance of the live in order to interrogate its traces.

*Out of a void spews endless noise describing it.  
Non-performance as practice explores the slippage.*

Early performance has been re-imagined and distorted through highly aesthetised photographic records. The sparse remains mythologise the practice of this era as 'other', viewed through the filter of these images. Where only a single image of a performance is available, it is repeated across numerous platforms, until ubiquitous and assumed as representative of the piece. The image reaches an audience who can only read the archive of a piece, yet read that as the work itself. Through its stylised, simplistic language the score retains a practised neutrality. The sparse nature of the record less betrays that original performance (or notion of it).

Text scores move from photography as a less leading representation of performance. The texts are read in the context of performance history - read alongside all that has previously come.

Attempting the purest singularity of a document, the score can be read without the performance, yet is it a requirement of the archival document that the event it describes took place?

### Secret Writing

1. Pull out window glass.
2. Write the answer to a question along the groove of the frame.
3. Replace the glass.
4. Tell no-one.



## Dismantle

1. Beginning with the roof, remove all nails and screws from the structure.
2. Remove each piece of wood.
3. Stack by size on the floor.
4. Rebuild the structure 30cm to the left, leaving in exactly the same condition as found.
5. Deny all knowledge of the shift.

#### 4.3.3 Letters in French and English (from Les Craiepers project)

##### **Letters in French and English (from Les Craiepers project)<sup>297</sup>**

**Process:** Collaborative project with artist Armelle Rabate who sent sculpted shoes with instructions to perform in them. The shoes were returned after two months.

**Archive:** Letter from Armelle. 10 sheets A4 paper with typewritten letters (5 English, 5 French translated). Photographs from exhibition of work in progress (*Play Harder*, March 2014, Piccadilly Place, Manchester, curated by MUTO). Photographs, notes and sketches from work in development.

*A brief correspondence takes place with Armelle through a mutual acquaintance. She wants to send me something to make new work from, I agree, and the following week a pair of shoes with a thick platform made from chalk arrive from Rennes, France with the instructions.*

Following the initial period of correspondence some images remain of performance of the artist wearing these shoes.

*I feel unsteady and uncertain wearing these. High off the ground, yet the weight of chalk stops me from properly lifting my feet to walk. Instead I shuffle.*

The experience equates somehow to the text Armelle sent me which was translated via Google. It stuttered, the rhythm not quite right, ricocheting between formal academic language and everyday terms. The same kind of uncertainty I felt whilst wearing the shoes.

---

<sup>297</sup> [hannahelizabethallan.info/letters](http://hannahelizabethallan.info/letters)

Hi,

I entrust to you this pair of shoes.

Les craiepers (chalk + creepers)

This object translate ambulation in real time, but also the specific approach trace.

The shoes are raised with fragile thick and colorful soles. They are doomed to disappear, and to reduce by the wear.

The soles are made of chalk. The colors in layers, could function as clue or time units.

As and when the performer is walking, the soles reducing, this one is closer to the ground and walking becomes less acrobatic, the walker becoming aware of his body in space.

Track and wear are two things that interest me. I usually work Drawing between random and control with protocols more or less restrictive, pushing me to depletion of simple shapes.

Working performative object including the intervention of a third party may bring new questions and above all uncontrolled share my research. I like the idea that these shoes have to travel so far from the place where they were designed to be used and leave their mark.

Document 30: *Letters*, instructions sent by Armelle for using the shoes

The idea of somehow emulating this style of translated text came in the process of writing letters to Armelle about the experience of wearing the shoes - I also translated them online, and because of this some of the language misplaced, although a meaning is still decipherable (according to French speakers). When exhibited these letters were displayed on either side of a column, with the shoes between. The audience also wore the shoes, which seemed an important element for them to understand how wearing them felt, and that I was attempting to communicate this in the texts.

The letters which remain are inaccurate, and in places seem imagined or untrue details are included. As readers, we cannot be certain of the narrative details, or the conceit surrounding the work. However, the objects we can view and letters we can read have clearly been manufactured. There is a certainty of artistic process, just as the act of speaking (or writing) confirms the presence of the author.

January 30th

Armelle,

I have worn your shoes everyday this week.  
They tether me to a surface, concrete and chalk.  
Shuffling and leaving a trail behind. A trace in  
fine dust that marks a route.

30 janvier

Armelle,

J'ai porté vos chaussures tous les jours  
cette semaine.

Ils m'ont attaché sur une surface, le béton et la  
craie. Brassage et laissant une trainée derrière.  
Une trace d'une fine poussière qui marque un  
itinéraire.

## Conclusion

The central aim of this study has been to define how far and in what ways artistic practice might exist within the archive, whilst co-existing as artwork. This has involved a consideration of how practice could be situated within, and contextualised by, the archive, and the converse effect upon the archive itself. I have explored how far these traces, might be considered as independent pieces of artwork, removed from the live gesture and the body of the archive itself. The research questions how the archival remains of a practice function within differing contexts and their relationship to both the other elements, future readings, and the original process of creation.

In carrying out this research there are multiple strands which combine in making up the enquiry, and are represented as such within the thesis. The method of triangulation was adopted as an approach, allowing me to situate both the study and myself as researcher between the roles of academic, artist and archivist. This initially took place using existing literatures in order to create a framework for the research, mapping the potential of the archive in each discipline. However, rather than remaining as separated and distinct roles, these perspectives interplay and merge as the research continued.

The study has been underscored by Ricoeur's theory of trace, in its key definition of a form akin to those remains of practice contained within the archive. The trace allowed for the creation and interrogation of elements of process which unlike more pre-meditated documentation, would also function as artwork. This trace allows for the 'something' of the passed event to be told, whilst remaining ultimately elusive; and became the model for mapping my practice led research working with performance and performative gestures. It also functions as a device to read and separate the archives of institutions and other artists. The inclusion of trace over document is, for example, what separates the Fluxus David Mayor archive from the British Library's Experimental Theatre and Live Art collection.

As the project developed, research focused increasingly on performative practices, and how these temporal artworks might be articulated through trace within the performance archive. This process led on to considering the value of these objects, and how far they could be read as independent works of art, both in relation to – and taken apart from – the context of that original performance. During this research my practice significantly shifted in response to the findings, following the reflective cycle and planning of such action led research. Specifically, this has led to focusing entirely on the performative practices, and their representation in archival forms. Whereas previously performance was one element of an interdisciplinary practice, it now forms the core of many projects, although the resulting traces and archive built represent a variety of artistic mediums. This refocusing was in response to the work on the trace and the archive strongly focusing and particularly resonating with investigations in the performance discipline, and allowed me to build upon existing knowledge on the performance archive.

Using practice led research, and exploring the work of other practitioners, I have found that the fragmentary elements of performance's practice and process can be both built into a larger archive structure, and function as works in their own right. These artwork-archive hybrids are distinguished from other forms of documentation in the qualities they demonstrate. Rather than attempting to represent an 'original' moment, they are the trace results of actions, or created through a process of reinterpretation. These elements of the performance archive have been placed both within and outside of the gallery and institutional contexts. With each of these shifts the meaning and reception of the work also alters; casting the work alternatively as artwork or installation, to part of an institutionalised, official body of documents.

The performance archive is further interrogated through a questioning of whether the original event necessarily needs to have taken place for the documentation and remains to function as 'genuine' ones might. This element of the research demonstrates the potential and ability of the archive to falsely represent histories, and how, in particular within the context of performative practices this allows for a disturbance of the usual



temporal expectations. As proposed by Schneider, a live work might be the recording of an earlier trace.

In turning to text and language, the study closes by positioning the artist as witness within the archive. The writing that exists within the archival space, particularly in the model of the performance score, exemplifies how trace as writing might display the intratemporal qualities Ricoeur described - existing as a relic of what has been, present physical remain, and spur to potential future action. The duality of this subject matter demonstrates the wider qualities of the artistic archive as a shifting body, which might cyclically refer back to itself, an active and present form.

Applying the literature of Ricoeur on trace and intratemporality to artistic practice, the study has demonstrated how this element of the archive functions as a product of, and approach to, performance practice within the archive. In doing so, the practice led research undertaken explores how these fragmented remains function as traces of live works both within the archive, as representative of the original, and as independent artwork. The potential of this form leads to an understanding of the resulting traces as a body which might dually perform both archival and artistic functions. Importantly, the interactions between these items in the archival format allows them to function as an artwork which represents the process and practice of the artist in a unique manner.

These traces created within an archival structure function as artwork, yet also map the absence of both the live gesture and the practicing artist. However, these markers of absence also function as a creative act. Like Borges' 1:1 scale map, or the adoption of such approaches by artists such as Neal White, my own archive maps, on and over, the live gestures of process. This body of work provides an entire account and encounter with the research which runs parallel to this thesis. It overwhelms any attempt to decipher a 'finished piece', instead representing the entirety of that practice.

The research undertaken around the performance archive and its existing literatures has sought to contextualise this knowledge in light of the trace and my own approach to

creating an archive-artwork. In re-reading Phelan's work I have sought to establish her *Unmarked* text as a basis for situating such experimental and interdisciplinary performance practices, as opposed to the more frequent interpretation of her writing against documentation in the performance genre. In working with these literatures (Schneider, Taylor, Reason), the thesis includes a consideration of how far the remains of performance discussed might be re-contextualised beyond the institutional archive space, and into the gallery or other curatorial contexts.

In engaging with these performance literatures through my practice led research, I found that the central element discussed - that of the live gesture – has become an essential element of my process. The performance acts as the instigating factor in a wider practice which results in the archive. Within my practice the debate has shifted from considering how a document or trace of performance might function within the archive, to approaching the performative moment as an element of a practice which the archive encompasses.

The taxonomy created for the performance archive is a model based upon both research into existing literatures, and developed through my own work with archives (documents created by other practitioners and myself). It is applicable to a range of performance remains, including those created by third parties, and which do not specifically represent the practice of an individual artist. My own practice and resulting archive does not span the entirety of the model, and nor does it intend to, the taxonomy created represents the fullest description of the archival remains I have encountered as a researcher. In combining both the physical documents and what might be considered metaphysical remnants, in one functioning model I demonstrate the inclusion of both aspects as essential to the performance archive.

How these archives of performative practices exist tangibly as physical remains, and their taxonomic structures, leads on to the decisions made around how the traces of my own practice would be situated within the context of the study. The institutional structure of the thesis is a set framework; yet within it are some representations of the remains

and artefacts which make up the archive of my work. The voice of the artist (my own), as engaged with the practice also enters the thesis as witness to what has passed. Links exist to further elements of the archive online, and there are the physical displays of the archive occurring in different locations. All of these demonstrate the ability to situate practice within the archive, but equally, that the form is one which can be reproduced, and shift across locations to create new meaning.

As the research has come to a conclusion within the thesis, the body of work which is the archive-artwork has continued to expand and becomes the focus of the study. It exists as a series of traces (both physical and digital) boxed in a state of functional entropy, one common to the practitioner's archive. The practice led work has resulted in a shifting body of traces, representing the three years of study, but also contains elements of what has gone before, and what is yet to come. Within it are the traces of works in development and for the future. By nature, this body of documents will evolve over time, and alter with each version of the display. The function of this archive-artwork in flux demonstrates and reflects the form of the archive itself as ultimately unfinished and in flux. This form of the archive is challenged further in terms of the dichotomy between the physical and imagined archive: played out through exploring the archive of both genuine and imagined performative actions, and the nature of the remains as physically present, or entirely digital.

The presentation of these traces as a whole body of work, and their location are essential elements in the current and future progression of this research. The question of presentation is posed in how far their 'genuine' state and ordering as an artist's working archive creates meaning for an audience, both as a whole and in terms of the connection between individual traces. Returning to that notion of original order and provenance as the central value of the archivist, I have tested whether this might function as curatorial method for the display of the practice archive, and how far the application (or subversion) of these techniques might be imposed upon the bodies of work in question.

In considering how the work is disseminated two central elements of consideration have been the context in which the archive is shown and the curatorial aesthetics employed. Shifting the location of the work has allowed for taking the artwork-archive into institutional spaces (the archive, the gallery) and beyond (artist led spaces, site specific appropriated urban contexts). In each case this has allowed for the observation of how far this effects change in the reading and meaning of the work for the audience. Simultaneously, the details of the display are explored through testing whether the aesthetics of display should tend toward the entropic activity of the individual's archive in use, the institutionalised boxing with catalogue, or a starker and cleaner aesthetic of the gallery.

Continuing my practice beyond the PhD, these findings might involve testing how well this archival form functions in recording the remains of work which was witnessed by a wider audience – how an established artist, company or collective might go about creating an archive of this kind, made up of traces, which dually functioned as independent artwork, whilst recognising the definitive live versions of their work.

In concentrating on an individual, series of usually unwitnessed performances I have created a body of work which answers different questions from those larger studies which seek to archive the contemporary performance canon in such a way that accurately represents the original live pieces. Instead, the focus is on creating an archival-artwork which can exist as an independent and evolving body of practice, which itself is 'live' in its reinterpretations. This echoes the wider implications of the study's findings: namely that the archive of practice is itself an evolving body in a state of constant flux, with multiple possible formations of its contents. The practice led research produced has been able to function within this structure due to its fluid nature, just as the traces of a practice are uncertain and open to interpretation, so the body which houses them is one which may exist in multiple contexts and the relationships between its constituent elements change in creating new meaning with each revision and revisiting of the content.

# Bibliography

## Publications

Abramović, Marina. *Marina Abramović : Objects, Performance, Video, Sound*. Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1995.

Agamben, Giorgio. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. New Ed. Cambridge, Mass; London: MIT Press, 2002.

Augé, Marc. *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. 2<sup>nd</sup> English language ed. London: Verso, 2008.

Auslander, Philip. *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. London: Routledge, 1999.

Bacon, J. "ARCHIVE, ARCHIVE, ARCHIVE!" *Circa : Contemporary Art Journal*, no. 119 (Spring 2007), pp.50-59.

Bán, Zsófia, and Hedvig Turai. *Exposed Memories: Family Pictures in Private and Collective Memory*. Budapest: AICA International Association of Art Critics, Hungarian Section, 2010.

Brimfield, Mel. *This Is Performance Art*. London: Black Dog Publications, 2011.

Bruno, Giuliana. *Public Intimacy: Architecture and the Visual Arts*. London: MIT, 2007.

Calle, Sophie. *Appointment With Sigmund Freud*. New York, N.Y.: Thames & Hudson in association with Violette Editions, 2005.

Clearly, Stephen. "Audio and Video Documentation of Performance at the British Library: 1963 to the Present." In *Capturing the Essence of Performance*, edited by Leclercq, Nicole, Davis, Kristy, Roisson, Laurent, and Jones, Alan R., 117–23. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010.

———. "Experimental Theatre and Live Art: Audio and Video Recordings." Text. Accessed September 3, 2014. <http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelprestype/sound/drama/dramaex/experimental.html>.

Connarty, Jane; Lanyon, Josephine. *Ghosting: The Role of the Archive within Contemporary Artists' Film and Video*. Bristol: Picture This, 2006.

Cook, Terry. "What Is Past Is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift." *Archivaria* 1, no. 43 (December 2, 1997).

Davies, Siobhan. "Siobhan Davies: Can Dance Be Archived?" *The Guardian*, sec. Culture Professionals Network. Accessed July 9, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/culture-professionals-network/culture-professionals-blog/2014/jan/09/siobhan-davies-dance-archives-ica>.

Derrida, Jacques. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press,

1998.

Ellis, J. *Keeping Archive*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edn. Port Melbourne, Victoria: D.W.Thorpe and the Australian Society of Archivists, 1993.

Foster, Hal. 'An Archival Impulse'. *October* 110 (2004): 3-22.

Foucault, Michel. *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Edited by Bouchard, Donald F.. New edition. New York: Cornell University Press, 1980.

———. *The Order of Things: Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. London: Routledge, 2005.

Freud, Sigmund; McLintock, David; Haughton, Hugh. *The Uncanny*. New York: Penguin Books, 2003.

George, Adrian. *Art, Lies and Videotape : Exposing Performance*. Liverpool: Tate Liverpool in association with Tate Publishing, 2003.

Goff, Jacques Le. "Documento/Monumento." *Enciclopedia Einaudi*. Turin: Einaudi, n.d.

———. *History and Memory*. First. Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1992.

Gray, Carole; Malins, Julia. *Vizualizing Research: A Guide to the Research Process in Art and Design*. Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004.

Green, Renée. "Survival: Ruminations on Archival Lacunae." In *Interarchive. Archival Practices and Sites in the Contemporary Art Field*, edited by Beatrice von Bismarck, Hans-Peter Feldmann, and Hans Ulrich Obrist, pp.147–53. Cologne: Verlag Der Buchhandlung Walther Konig, 2002.

Groys, Boris; Ross, David A.; Blazwick, Iwona. *Ilya Kabakov*. London: Phaidon, 1998.

Harris, Jonathan; Tate Gallery Liverpool. *Dead History, Live Art? : Spectacle, Subjectivity and Subversion in Visual Culture since the 1960s*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007.

Heathfield, Adrian. *Small Acts : Performance, the Millennium and the Marking of Time*. London: Black Dog, 2000.

Hiller, Susan; Lippard, Lucy; Einzig, Barbara. *Thinking about Art: Conversations with Susan Hiller*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996.

Hodson, John Howard. *The Administration of Archives*. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1972.

Ibsen, Henrik; Fillinger, Johan; Fry, Christopher. *Peer Gynt: A Dramatic Poem*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

International Council on Archives, and Committee on Descriptive Standards. *ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description : Adopted by the Ad Hoc Commission on Descriptive Standards*, Stockholm, Sweden, 19-22 September 1999. Ottawa: [Committee on Descriptive Standards], 1999.

Jalving, Camilla. "Inventing Reality: On Truth and Lies in the Work of Hayley Newman." In *Performative Realism: Interdisciplinary Studies in Art and Media*, edited by Gade, Rune and Jerslev, Anne. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2005, pp. 145–80.

Johnston, Chloe. "'The Lovers': On the Great Wall and beyond." *Performance Research* 17, no. 5 (October 1, 2012): pp.19–23.

Jones, Amelia. "'Presence' in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation." *Art Journal* 56, no. 4 (1997): pp.11–18.

Kabakov, Ilya Iossifovich; Jolles, Claudia. *10 Albums, 10 Characters*. London: Riverside Studios, 1989.

Kaye, Nick. *Art into Theatre: Performance Interviews and Documents*. Australia: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996.

Keidan, Lois. "Double Exposure." In *Encounters: Manuel Vason: Performance, Photography, Collaboration*, by Vason, Manuel and Johnson, Dominic, pp.18–19. Bristol: Arnolfini, 2007.

Kotz, Liz. *Words to Be Looked at: Language in 1960s Art*. London: MIT, 2007.

Lane, Victoria. "An Interview With Barbara Steveni." In *All This Stuff: Archiving the Artist*, edited by Vaknin, Judy and Stuckey, Karyn, pp.63–78. Oxfordshire: Libri Publishing, 2013.

Lepecki, André. "'After All, This Terror Was Not Without Reason': Unfiled Notes on the Atlas Group Archive." *TDR/The Drama Review* 50, no. 3 (August 24, 2006): pp.88–99.

Machon, Josephine, and Susan Broadhurst. *Performance and Technology: Practices of Virtual Embodiment and Interactivity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Maude-Roxby, Alice. *Live Art on Camera : Performance and Photography*. Southampton: John Hansard Gallery, 2007.

McTighe, Monica E. "The Politics of Representation: Archive and Memory in the Work of Renee Green." In *Framed Spaces: Photography and Memory in Contemporary Installation Art*. pp.72–115. Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press, 2012.

Merewether, Charles, ed. *The Archive*. London: Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2006.

Morris, Frances; Larratt-Smith, Philip; Bourgeois, Louise. *Insomnia in the Work of Louise Bourgeois: Has the Day Invaded the Night or the Night Invaded the Day?* Edinburgh: Fruitmarket Gallery, 2013.

Muller, Samuel; Fruin, Robert; Feith, Johan Adriaan. *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives: Drawn Up by Direction of the Netherlands Association of Archivists*. Translated by Leavitt, Arthur H. New York: H.W. Wilson Company, 1940.

Newman, Hayley. *Locating Performance : Textual Identity and the Performative*. Leeds: University of Leeds, 2001.

Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire." *Representations*, no. 26 (April 1989): pp.7–24.

Perec, Georges; Sturrock, John. *Species of Space and Other Pieces: Georges Perec*. London: Penguin, 1997.

Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Pollock, Della. "Performative Writing." In *The Ends of Performance*, edited by Phelan, Peggy; Lane, Jill, pp.73–103. London: New York University Press, 1998.

Procter, Margaret Ruth; Cook, Michael. *A Manual of Archival Description*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Aldershot: Gower, 2000.

Rampley, Matthew. "Archives of Memory: Walter Benjamin's Arcades Project and Aby Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas." In *The Optic of Walter Benjamin*, edited by Coles, Alex, pp.94–117. London: Black Dog Publishing, 1999.

———. *The Remembrance of Things Past: On Aby M. Warburg and Walter Benjamin*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 2000.

Reason, Matthew. *Documentation, Disappearance and the Representation of Live Performance*. Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. New edition. London: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

———. *Time and Narrative, Volume 3*. Translated by Blamey, Kathleen; Pellauer, David. London: University Of Chicago Press, 1990.

Ross, David A; Grois, Boris; Blazwick, Iwona. *Ilya Kabakov*. London : Phaidon, 1998.

Schneider, Rebecca. "In the Meantime: Performance Remains." In *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*, pp.87–110. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2011.

———. "Performance Remains." *Performance Research* 6, no. 2 (2001): pp.100–108.

Schweizer, Nicole; Green, Renée. *Renée Green: Ongoing Becomings Retrospective 1989–2009*. Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2009.

Shanks, Michael; Giannachi, Gabriella; Kaye, Nick. *Archaeologies of Presence: Art, Performance and the Persistence of Being*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Smithson, Robert; Flam, Jack. *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*. London: University of California Press, 1996.

Spieker, Sven. *Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy*. London: MIT Press, 2008.



Steedman, Carolyn. *Dust*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001.

Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Cultural Memory and Performance in the Americas*. London: Duke University Press, 2003.

Templeton, Fiona. *You, the City*. New York: Roof Books, 1990.

Vason, Manuel; Johnson, Dominic. *Encounters: Manuel Vason: Performance, Photography, Collaboration*. Bristol: Arnolfini, 2007.

Velios, Athanasios. "Creative Archiving: A Case Study from the John Latham Archive." *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 32, no. 2 (October 2011): 255–71.

Whately, Sarah. "Dance Encounters Online: Digital Archives and Performance." In *Performing Archives/Archives of Performance*, edited by Borggreen, Gunhild and Gade, Rune, pp.163–78. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2013.

White, Neal. "Experiments and Archives in the Expanded Field." In *All This Stuff: Archiving the Artist*, edited by Judy Vaknin, Victoria Lane, and Karyn Stuckey, pp. 47-62. Oxfordshire: Libri Publishing, 2013.

## Archives

*Cornerhouse Visual Arts Archive* (uncatalogued). Cornerhouse, Oxford Road, Manchester, England (housed off site).

*David Mayor/Fluxshoe/Beau Geste Press papers* (1951 – 1985): TGA 815. Tate Gallery Archive, Tate Britain, London, England.

*Experimental theatre and live art: audio and video recordings* (1985 - ). Sound Archive, British Library, London, England.

*John Latham Archive* (founded 2006). Online archive accessed <http://www.ligatus.org.uk/aae>. A project by Ligatus and the University of the Arts London. London, England.

*MMU Special Collections* (founded 1853). Sir Kenneth Green Library, All Saints, Manchester, England.

*Siobhan Davies Replay* (1972 - ). Online archive accessed <http://www.siobhandaviesreplay.com>. Collaboration between Siobhan Davies Dance and Coventry University.

*Stanley Kubrick Archive* (founded 2008). University of the Arts London, London, England.

## Artworks, Exhibitions, Performances

Aby Warburg, *Mnemosyne Atlas*, 1927-29. Mixed media collage.

Artist Placement Group, *The Individual and the Organisation: 1966-79*, exhibition at Raven Row, London, 2012.

Atlas Group, *Missing Lebanese Wars*, 1996-2002. Archival materials, performances, lectures, exhibitions.

Chris Burden, *Deadman*, 1972. Performance documented through photograph and text.

Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #35, #93*, 1979-81.

Francesca Fini, *The Playhub*, 2013. Performance, Helsinki Contemporary Art Gallery.

George Brecht, *WaterYam*, 1963. Text cards in box.

Hayley Newman, *Connotations*, 1998. Photographic and text installation, various venues.

Ilya Kabakov, *10 Characters*, 1972-75. Illustrations and text in folders.

Louise Bourgeois, *Insomnia Drawings*, 1994-5. Drawings, Fruitmarket Gallery 2014.

Marina Abramović, *Art Must Be Beautiful; Artist Must Be Beautiful*, 1975. Online video documentation from original film:  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1smoNE6Stc&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1smoNE6Stc&feature=youtube_gdata_player).

Murray Grigor, (director); Marina Abramović; Ulay (writers, performers) *The Great Wall: Lovers at the Brink*, 1990. Online access:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zaso0j9x098>

Olivia Wiederkehr, *Spatial Practice of Everyday Use*, 2013. Performance, Espoo Museum, Helsinki.

Renée Green, *Partially Buried in Three Parts*, 1996-97. Multi-media installation.

Rooms, *Ritual #1: Counting Birds*, 2013. Performance, Helsinki.

Siobhan Davies Dance, *Table of Contents*, 2014. Performance, Glasgow Tramways.

Sophie Calle, *Invitations*, 1999. Installation, Freud Museum, London.

Susan Hiller, *From The Freud Museum*, 1991-96. Installation, Freud Museum, London.

Susan Hiller, *After The Freud Museum*, 1994. Installation, Tate Britain, London.

Tacita Dean, *Disappearance at Sea*, 1996.

Tacita Dean, *Teignmouth Electron*, 1999